

SOONER OR LATER
COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS.

VOL. 958.

SOONER OR LATER BY SHIRLEY BROOKS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

NEW YORK

COLLECTION

OF THE

BRITISH AUTHORS

VOL. 22

PRINTED BY J. H. B. BROS.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. 1

1800-1809

1810-1819

SOONER OR LATER.

BY

SHIRLEY BROOKS,

AUTHOR OF "THE SILVER CORD," ETC.

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

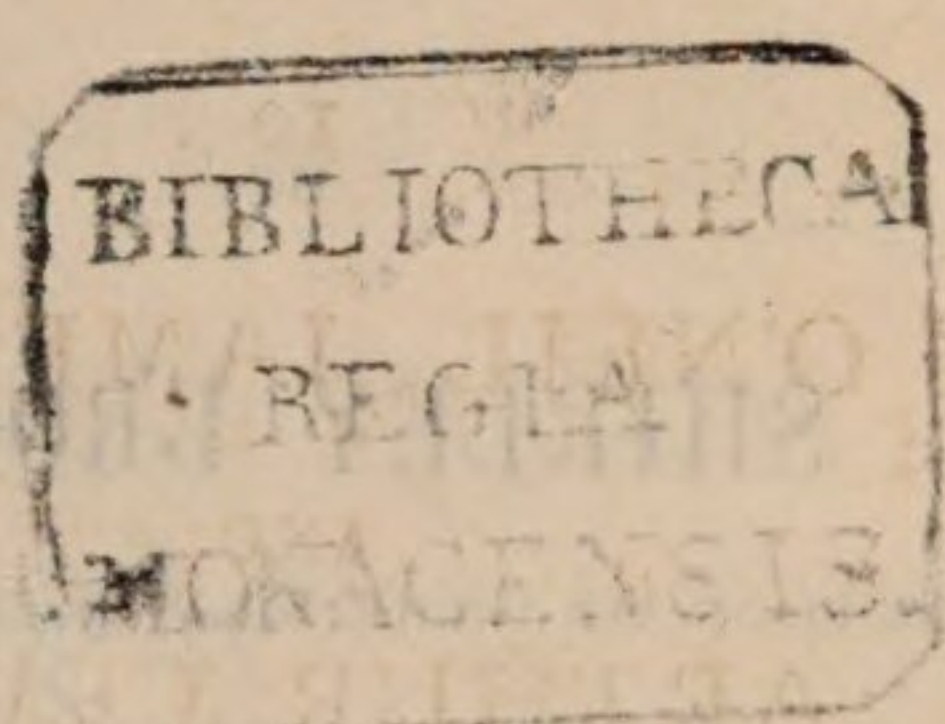
LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1868.

The Right of Translation is reserved.

BOOKS OR LATER



CHRISTIE
REGAN
MONTACENSIS

INSCRIBED IN THE

WHICH WAS PLACED IN THE

IN THE
HIGHLAND HOME

OF OUR RECORD

JOHN PHILLIPS

LIBRARY

RECORDED IN THE

THE

THE

TO
HENRY O'NEIL, JAMES CHRISTIE,
AND
ARTHUR LEWIS,
I INSCRIBE THIS TALE,
WHICH WAS PLANNED IN THE
"HIGHLAND HOME"
OF OUR FRIEND
JOHN PHILLIP.

TO

HENRY O'NEIL, JAMES CHRISTIE

AND

ARTHUR LEWIS

I INSCRIBE THIS TALE

WHICH HAS BEEN READ TO THE

"NIGHT AND HOME"

OF THE CLUB

JOHN PHILLIPS

P R E F A C E.

A PREFACE is a pleasant thing to write, whatever it may be to read, and the author of this story ventures, as on former occasions, to say a few words which, though they introduce his book, have something of retrospection.

To those who have accepted the tale in its monthly instalments it is due to say that it was originally intended to occupy fourteen numbers only, but that the author did not hesitate between the alternatives of excluding from his picture some features which he thought desirable, and of venturing on a small extension of his canvas.

During the progress of the story the author has been favoured with a great number of private communications, for the most part anonymous, in reference to various portions of the work. A few of the letters have been couched in a language which precludes them from any kind of notice, but these amenities of criticism have been repaid tenfold by information to the effect that the author has given much gratification to a number of persons whom he is happy to have pleased.

These two acknowledgments it would hardly have been necessary to make, as they do but refer to the ordinary incidents of periodical authorcraft. But he would add a word to some private critics of a different kind.

Exception has been taken to the introduction of certain incidents and characters, to which he will not directly point, and he has also been accused of unfriendliness to what is not improperly called the religious world.

In the exercise of that judgment which must be permitted even to an author — that person whom, in common with the painter, every intellect deems itself qualified and authorized to teach, — he selected a series of incidents which could not be brought about by the agency of the virtuous. The greatest of our satirists has said that it would be unadvisable, in England, to give a truthful account of the life of a young Englishman. The writer has not sought to do in any fullness that which Thackeray has asserted should not be done, but both in regard to the young Englishman whose marriage is the turning point of the story, and to many of the subordinate personages, he has eschewed the mockery of escaping into generalities which mean nothing to those who are unacquainted with evil, and which are laughed at by those who are less fortunate. There are several bad persons in this story, but though

the author disclaims any idea of composing a book on the principle of virtue being rewarded and vice punished, it will be seen that departure from morality has conducted each person in his or her degree to the end which — in the absence of repentance and reformation — it is orthodox to prepare for the evil-doer. In no case has the author defended the vicious, or committed the more dangerous and despicable offence of encouraging vice by portraying it as successful. He is not quite sure indeed whether he ought not to take still higher ground, and to claim praise for having relied, in these passionate days, upon interest not arising from a breach of the commandments which refer to conjugal relations.

In the matter of the second animadversion he has received letters of a kind which entitle the writers to respectful consideration, but he will only say that they have been written for the most part without sufficient attention to the entire bearing of the work, and, notably, without regard to the character in which is embodied the best form of religion which the author can typify.

To these “notices to correspondents” the author will only add that if he makes no formal acknowledgment of the continuous kindness which his serial has received from his fellow craftsmen of the critical press, it is not that he is not as sensible as ever of that kindness, but

because he is so constantly working among them, and answering and being answered by them from other platforms, that the dropping into conventional phrase here would seem to place him among those social felons who rise at a feast and must be allowed to say a few words for which their hearers wish them in Tophet.

His other friends, the public, have given this book so warm a welcome, that it would be ungrateful not to acknowledge the fact, or not to regard it as an invitation.

KENT TERRACE, REGENT'S PARK,
Christmas, 1867.

CONTENTS

OF VOLUME I.

	Page
CHAPTER I. Andrew Barton	13
— II. One Sunday Evening	29
— III. The Octagon Club	41
— IV. Magdalen's Home	62
— V. "They do Say" —	79
— VI. Magdalen	89
— VII. The Curate of Saxbury	110
— VIII. The British Drama	133
— IX. In the Garden	154
— X. Honor a Nilo	165
— XI. Dorcas at Home	183
— XII. The Rectory	209
— XIII. Damon and Pythias	224
— XIV. Old Friends and a Photograph	237
— XV. Mangling in his Lair	262
— XVI. "Of Friends, however humble, scorn not one"	276
— XVII. Antenuptial	312
— XVIII. Mr. Mangles's Report	338
— XIX. Golden Eggs	350
— XX. Hearts in the Highlands	367
— XXI. The Honeymoon, and its Setting	388

SOONER OR LATER.

CHAPTER I.

Andrew Barton.

ON the Holborn side of the great legal quadrilateral which adjoins the gardens dear to us from memories of dear old Sir Roger de Coverley, is a smaller square, three sides of which are composed of houses let in sets of chambers, chiefly to lawyers, the fourth and northern side being occupied by the hall and other buildings belonging to the Inn. This square is a quiet little bay lying close to one of the great, roaring, rushing rivers of London life, and would be almost noiseless but that human vessels in quest of legal pilots are constantly putting in through the narrow channel that leads into the busy river. Separated from the Inn by a squalid and dirty lane on the east, lies in festering wretchedness and wickedness one of the worst districts of the metropolis, while on the west an intermixture of old-fashioned and decorous streets, and a few of exceeding uncleanness and poverty, interpose between the Inn and the regions of civilisation. Such landmarks may not now be useless to the reader whose London is in the Court Directory, and some years later may be convenient to an adventurer who shall leave the railways of the day, and explore the districts

whence traffic shall have departed, on the invitation of steam, or of its successor.

One hot afternoon in early August, when the minds of the legal gentlemen of the Inn were excited, if not softened, by the approach of their holidays, a small crowd had hastily gathered round the doorway of one of the houses in the square.

A workman, apparently a tiler, had fallen from the parapet of the house, and lay upon the stone pavement.

The five or six persons who were in the square at the moment hurried up, and from the house itself, and from chambers where those near the windows had observed either the accident or the rush to the spot, came solicitors, clerks of various grades, boys, clients, and stragglers.

Those who were nearest turned away, shocked and pale, and pushed out of the little crowd, while others took their places. No one, however, cared to touch the man.

He did not move a limb. He had fallen in a heap, and some grizzled hair under an old blue cap, and the brown skin at the back of his neck, were all that could be seen of his head. One arm was under him, the other, thrust out as if he had sought to break the fearful fall, lay straight on the flag.

A white-aproned porter forced his way through the throng, touching his hat, even at that moment, to two or three gentlemen past whom he pressed.

"It's Andrew Barton," he said, after a moment's look at the poor fellow. "But I don't know what call he had to be here," added the porter. "He had a job at the corner, I know."

"Never mind that now, Parker," said one of the gentlemen. "Get the police and a stretcher, and have him moved to the hospital."

"One might do more harm than good by touching him," said a quiet, elderly clerk, not quite easy at doing nothing, and yet very willing to have an excuse for avoiding the ghastly sight which must be presented by turning the man round.

"There's not much harm to be done after a fall of four storeys," said a very well-dressed young gentleman, who was serving his articles; "but we'll see."

Mr. Farquhar piqued himself upon his nerve, and liked, or said he liked, to be taken by medical students to see operations. He advanced to move the man, and there was a sensation in the crowd, some of the foremost hastily drawing backwards.

The young lawyer had his hand on the side of the fallen man, when there was a cry.

"Stop, stop, better let the doctor do it."

Perhaps, not altogether displeased, Mr. Farquhar drew back, and made way for the person thus described, who had been fetched from a neighbouring street.

He was a middle-aged man, somewhat too stout for his height, but rather handsome, and with features which would have been pleasing but for their discouraged and discontented expression. His full brown whiskers and beard curled well, and his blue-grey eyes were good, but lacked brightness. Carelessly dressed, and wearing an intolerably non-professional cap, he jerked himself at the work to which he was called, instead of approaching it with the calm but rapid movement which marks the practised healer of men,

"Here he is, Mr. Dudley," said the porter who had mentioned the name of the unfortunate man.

"I can see that," said Mr. Dudley, rudely. "Am I to come any nearer?" he added, stopping in his walk.

Ample room was made round him, and nobody seemed to see the necessity for his thus instantly proceeding to make himself disagreeable; but his doing so did not diminish him in the eyes of many of the crowd. He then condescended to advance to the body, and to kneel on one knee that he might examine it the better. Then the bystanders closed round him, at their peril.

"Is there life?" a voice ventured to inquire.

Mr. Dudley looked up with enough rage in his face to imply that he could have saved the victim but for the wicked interference and interruption.

"Who asks?" he said, savagely.

It was the elderly clerk who had spoken, but for a moment he was actually deterred from acknowledging it. But Mr. Dudley glared round for his answer, and the elderly clerk plucked up his spirit, and was about to speak.

"Is it a fatal case?"

The words were given in no humble tone this time, and Mr. Dudley instantly recognised two facts — first that a new speaker was present, and secondly that he heard a voice whose owner had confronted him, by no means to his comfort, at a certain criminal trial some months previously. The great advocate, Serjeant Penguin, had joined the crowd, and had saved the elderly clerk from the storm that would have descended on him when Mr. Dudley, quitting his examination, arose

to his feet in wrath. The storm was stayed — it was not upon Mr. Serjeant Penguin that Mr. Dudley, however angry, was inclined to discharge it. But he was resolute on insulting somebody.

“If idiotic people would have the sense to stand back,” said Mr. Dudley, “I could tell you, Mr. Serjeant. Perhaps you may have influence enough to get them to do so. Ah! here are the police.”

In two minutes more the body of Andrew Barton was being borne from the square, Mr. Dudley having made, or affected to make, a brief examination, after which he had laid a cloth over the head of the poor fellow. He did not, however, deem it wise to affront the last speaker, and edging near him, said:

“It is of no use, but they may take him to my surgery.”

“Makes a paragraph, Mr. Dudley, eh?” said the serjeant, quietly.

He let the crowd disperse, the superior part of it resolving itself once more into professional life, the rest forming an escort ready to follow the body to Mr. Dudley’s, or anywhere else, as permitted by the happy otiosity enjoyed by the million. The lawyer scanned the front of the house from whose top the man had fallen. There was, however, nothing to distinguish it from its neighbours. One of the windows above the parapet was open, as was natural in such weather. There were no signs of a labourer’s having been at work there, but the careful eye of the observer detected on the coping, at some distance, the handle of a tool, and some newly-laid mortar round a single tile. Of course, his act of accusation was ready at a moment’s notice.

“Those fellows never fall when at their lawful work.

He had been taking a round of observation, of course, a snapping up of unconsidered trifles" (the serjeant was capital at Shakspearian quotation, having professed acting in earlier life, though he acted far better before a jury than ever before an audience), "and our unfortunate Autolycus came to grief. He got in at that window, probably annexed something which friend Dudley will find upon him, and will or will not produce as circumstances may dictate, heard the proprietor's latch-key in the door, made too hasty a retreat, and fell over. Who lies i' the second chamber?"

He went to the doorway, and putting up his gold eye-glass read the names there painted.

"'Wimperley and Blamper,' ground floor: most respectable," said the serjeant, who had a way of talking to himself — sometimes, it was imagined, when somebody was sure to hear him. "First floor, 'Mr. Gerald Kildare:' very rising man indeed; good family. Second floor, 'Orbit and Wheeler:' celebrated engineers; most celebrated, saw a wonderful plan of theirs at the Society of Arts — couldn't understand an infernal line of it," interpolated the great lawyer, frankly. "Top floor, 'Mr. Percy Vaughan.' Don't know anything about him, but he is the person whom the poor fellow yonder came to plunder, and has died for coming. 'For worms, brave Percy.' If he has lost a watch or any such trifle, he had better inquire of friend Dudley."

"Very shocking thing, sir," said the porter, who had known the serjeant before his promotion, and as a sojourner in the Inn. He had lingered at a respectful distance, but came up as the gold eye-glass fell again.

"A shocking thing indeed, Parker," said the ser-

jeant, with his pleasantly rolling utterance. "A very shocking thing, Parker. You knew the man well, you said, Parker?"

The porter had said nothing of the kind, but the serjeant had a habit of assuming admissions.

"No, sir, I know very little about him, except that he has done odd jobs about for a year or more."

"His name I thought you mentioned — Barling, or something — I have such a way of forgetting names."

He never forgot one, and having heard this, knew it as well as the porter did.

"Andrew Barton, sir."

"Married? — children? — I hope not, Parker."

"Yes, sir, but a bad lot, I doubt. At least I have seen his wife when she has come to bring his dinner now and then, and I don't know that I ever see her without a black eye."

"Hm! Bad. But she's had the last of her black eyes now, unless she marries again. Something must be done for her, I suppose? If you hear of anything of the sort going on, my clerk will give you a sovereign."

"I'm sure you're very good, sir."

"We must help our fellow-creatures in misfortune, you know, Parker — that's the golden rule."

And the serjeant went off to Serjeants' Inn, to consider how he could best help a fellow-creature who had had the misfortune to be discovered in the act of burglary.

Meantime the police conveyed the body of Andrew Barton to the residence of Mr. Dudley. It was in one of the small streets which, as has been said, are mixed

up with the old-fashioned and respectable dwelling-places west of the Inn. Mr. Dudley had a shop, whereat could be procured not only the means, more or less adulterate, of curing the frame when sick, but where, with a noble forethought, he also supplied, in the form of sanatory applications, what is better than cure — namely, prevention. Cleanliness, which we all know has so very distinguished a neighbour next to it on one side, has on the other a neighbour only second in the estimation of the wise, namely healthiness, and Mr. Dudley sold soap. He performed certain operations in dentistry, but care renders such things needless, and Mr. Dudley disinterestedly sold the appliances the neglect whereof makes the dentist rich. Aware, too, that health is much promoted by attention to personal appearance, Mr. Dudley did not hesitate to sell the oil that maketh the servant-maid's hair to shine, nor did he disdain to increase her attractions by the addition of scent for her stubborn cambric kerchief. Of the more elevated portion of his professional practice it will be the less necessary to speak, for a reason which will shortly appear, but it may be added that Mr. Dudley had a large-minded confidence in the constituted authorities, and would sell any remedy to which Government (after the earnest and conscientious investigation by its special officer which precedes the sending out a medicine accredited by the Sovereign), lent its stamp, and that he extended the same large confidence to mankind in general, implicitly relying upon the statement of any customer that the deleterious or poisonous drug he or she required was wanted for the most innocent, nay, laudable, of purposes. So good a man should have succeeded:

but a good man struggling with difficulties is said to be a sight the gods love; and their good nature had been indulged in the case of Mr. Dudley, who, up to the time of which we are speaking, had been needy while he confined himself to every-day practice, and had, whenever he ventured on a *coup*, come into unpleasant contact with some minion of the law. But the gods were growing tired of their favourite sight.

"It is Mr. Dudley's way," he used to say, "never to throw away a chance," and perhaps it is found, in this curious world, that men who are so fond of hoarding chances often squander certainties. At all events, those who have gained the best stakes at the play-table of life, are thought to have done it by minding, steadily, the game itself, and have done little in the way of two-penny betting with bystanders, or even of picking up coins accidentally dropped. But Mr. Dudley took his own course, and adhered to it with a perseverance which merited reward. The outspoken serjeant had hit the mark when he alluded to a paragraph as Mr. Dudley's object in having the body removed to his own surgery. It was a point in his little game of life to procure such an advertisement. The accident would be recorded in the papers. The public around Mr. Dudley would be reminded of the existence of an accomplished practitioner, who instantly hurried to the spot, and with his habitual humanity and promptness caused the unfortunate man to be conveyed to the surgery, No. 17, Lancaster Street, Holborn, where every resource of science was brought to bear upon a case which, however, was hopeless, but it was a consolation to his bereaved friends to know that even a Ferguson or a Thompson (it was something to get the

words Ferguson, Thompson, and Dudley into the same paragraph) could have done no more than was done by Mr. Dudley.

Such an announcement, to be supplied to a few newspapers, by a friendly scribe, was all that Mr. Dudley hoped to gain from the accident which made him the temporary curator of the unfortunate Barton. But how little do we know when great things are in store for us.

He found, clutched in the hand that had lain under the body when first seen, a locket, of no great value.

This he easily and secretly secured, as the policeman turned to repel the crowd that swarmed into the shop.

And he found life.

Life, and but little of it, as may well be believed. But enough to enable the poor, shattered, dying man to utter a few words, which Mr. Dudley, all ear and greed, extracted to the last syllable, the last sob.

An hour later the dead man was carried away.

For reasons inexplicable, but according to the custom of the intelligent many, small crowds continued to assemble and gaze severely at the front of Mr. Dudley's shop for many hours after the removal of the remains. Ordinarily, Mr. Dudley, scoffing at their folly, and raging at their impeding casual customers, would rush out and try to disperse such assemblage by dint of language not to be condemned for weakness. But upon the present occasion, his not unpleasant face was un-

disturbed by contempt or indignation. He stood behind his counter, and smiled in a manner which greatly troubled the mind of his boy, a youth whose lines had not fallen in pleasant places, and who was a good deal beaten (generally deserving it) by his arbitrary master. This evening, however, though Mr. Dudley seemed not to care greatly to attend to customers, he was actually affable in his occasional directions to the youth, and responded to any business inquiries from him in a manner which was bewildering from its good nature. The younger medical gentleman, instead of receiving abuse from the elder, varied, when the shop was empty, by a vicious dig, or a box on the ears, was upon this occasion treated so kindly that he was at first astounded, and then irritated, and conceiving that his employer had some deep-laid plan for humiliating or oppressing him, was obliged to relieve his mind by frequently diving under the counter, and there making the most fearful grimaces by way of payment in advance for the wrongs he anticipated. But Mr. Dudley heeded him not, and when the hour came for closing the shop, and finally shutting out the big bottles of coloured water from the view of the dissatisfied crowd, the incensed and puzzled assistant performed the duty with a wild and wilful clatter, one quarter of which, on another evening, would have sent him hungering and sore to his bed. But Mr. Dudley marked it not, and filled up the cup of the youth's endurance by giving him a small sum of money to buy some beer, liberality ill-rewarded by the savage toast in which the furious boy invoked discomfort on his master. And Mr. Dudley sat up late that night, thinking.

He had better have acted promptly. He threw

away advantages while he was meditating his course. Had he, the instant that he was in possession of the knowledge which he extorted from his dying patient, hastened back to the square, Dudley would have marvellously mended his chances. In the morning it was too late.

In the morning, however, and just before the hour when legal business usually begins, Mr. Dudley again entered the square. Various of the hard-faced women who act as servants to the profession were scuttling hither and thither, but with somewhat less of their ordinary slipshod haste. The catastrophe of the previous day was in their minds, and they felt it necessary to hold small indignation meetings from time to time, discuss the event, and gaze at the house before which it had happened. These inferior ministers of the law are not thought to entertain very friendly sentiments towards each other, nor did their conferences tend greatly to promote such feelings. But it was a duty to talk. With the curious faculty appertaining to the order, the conclaves managed to affix blame, in connection with the event, in quarters to which blame would scarcely seem to attach. Pity for the man was reproachfully expressed, and considerable disapprobation was expressed touching the Benchers, on the not improbable hypothesis that they were just then eating their comfortable breakfasts, and not thinking of the poor fellow who had been killed in putting new tiles on their property. It was also urged, with surly assent, that many folks cared very little what happened to anybody but themselves, and that if rich people had to mend their own tiles, they would not be in quite such a hurry to see that tiles were broken. It was, with

one exception, unanimously agreed that the occupants of the house from which Barton had fallen ought to do something handsome for his wife and children, and the single opposition speaker who could not at all see it in that way, and did not know what the gentleman on the first floor (who happened to be her employer) had to do with the matter, was accused of having no children, and informed that if she had any she would not go on in that manner. To her not unfair rejoinder that it was in conformity with social rule to have a husband previously to having children, and that she was not so lucky as to possess the preliminary advantage, she was sarcastically reproved for not knowing when she was well off. In much additional discussion, in the same key, a good deal of time was spent, until various smart, and mostly undersized boys began to arrive at a prodigious pace, and to rush up their respective stairs, whistling violently while they dared enjoy that recreation, and before their stern superiors should come and make it *leze majesté*.

Mr. Dudley's form, larger than any usually seen in the Inn at that hour, attracted some attention, and he was at once recognised by several of the women, with whom he was rather popular. For he was easy with his prices when dealing with any of them, looking to possible recommendations, which, given in the hurry attendant on sudden illness, had more than once procured him a good patient in the person of a terrified bachelor in chambers.

"Good morning, Mr. Dudley. Out early, sir."

"Yes, Mrs. Partridge, I am always out early. I have seen five or six patients already, and thought I would look in, on my way back to breakfast, just to

look at the place that poor fellow fell from. This was the house, I think."

"This house, sir."

"A fearful fall; but perhaps it was better so than to linger for months in the hospital. Whose chambers are those at the top?"

"I really don't know, Mr. Dudley. My business stops at the first floor, and where my business stops, I stop."

"A very sensible rule, Mrs. Partridge. But I suppose the gentleman who occupies those rooms has his name up. Mr. Percy Vaughan —" he said, reading the inscriptions. "I should think he would be called before the coroner. Somebody hinted that poor Barton might have been in the room with the open window."

"Somebody would be sure to say that, Mr. Dudley. Always suspect poor folks, of course, that's the way. But I shouldn't think that a gentleman on a top floor was likely to have much worth stealing."

"O, I don't accuse poor Barton a bit," said Mr. Dudley; "and it is in his favour, as I shall be ready and glad to say at the inquest, that nothing was found upon him by the police. I insisted on their searching before he was removed, and I can testify to the fact. A poor person's character is as valuable to him as a rich man's, Mrs. Partridge; and more so."

"It's very noble of you to say it, Mr. Dudley, and it's what few gentlemen think," said Mrs. Partridge, whose sentimental zeal for the character of her order did her the more credit, inasmuch as, if her friends were not misinformed, it was notoriously disinterested.

"I am sorry for it, Mrs. Partridge. You don't

happen to know this Mr. Vaughan's laundress, I suppose?"

It is the business of ladies of Mrs. Partridge's profession never to know anything, but Mr. Dudley's sympathetic talk had worked her into a slightly abnormal state, and she replied readily enough.

"I have seen a patient of yours going up-stairs, sometimes, Mr. Dudley, and I suppose she does for Mr. Vaughan, but I never asked her. You know little Mrs. Wraggle, the same as had an eye about Christmas."

The description might have sounded mystically to some auditors, but it enabled Mr. Dudley to identify the person he wanted.

"Ah, poor thing! the fair little woman whose husband is a brute."

"She may give him cause, for what I know, Mr. Dudley," said Mrs. Partridge, with some bitterness.

"Very true, Mrs. Partridge. It is a bad world. She may be up there now. I will just go up and see."

He hastily mounted the stairs, abusing them for being so numerous, but though most of the other doors were open, the single door on the top landing was closed. The doctor rattled it, but no answering word was given. Then he peeped into the letter slit, but the oaken door within was as closely shut as its companion. He sat upon, or rather against the dusty shelf by the window, and waited some ten minutes in the chance of Mrs. Wraggle's arrival, but that patient came not. Finally, in an evil temper, Mr. Dudley went home, and it was a bad morning for his junior.

We may remove poor Andrew Barton from the scene. The coroner's inquest was duly holden, and it

elicited no fact with which we are unacquainted, while one or two small matters, known to the reader and to Mr. Dudley, were not revealed to the intelligent jury. It was shown that Barton was occasionally employed in repairs for the Inn, that he had certain work to do on the morning of his death, and that he had nearly completed his task. In answer to a teetotal juryman who always introduced his favourite moral, in season or out of season, it was testified that Barton was perfectly sober when he went to his work. No evidence was adduced to show why he had gone to that part of the parapet whence he had fallen. Mr. Vaughan's laundress attended the inquest and stated that her employer had been out of town on the day of the accident, and for several days previously, that he had since visited his chambers, had left some written orders for her, which she produced, but had said nothing of any theft or loss. He had again left town, and his return was uncertain. She did not know that he had ever heard of the disaster, but she was told that it was mentioned in the papers. We know what Mr. Dudley intended to say, and he said it. The jury returned the usual verdict, which they coupled with a recommendation to the Benchers of the Inn to place a strong iron railing all round their parapets, and the Coroner, a gentleman of sense and humour, bit his lip rather severely while gravely taking note of the advice. So Andrew Barton died, and was buried.

CHAPTER II.

One Sunday Evening.

WE are still detained in the prosaic locality to which the reader has been introduced, and it has become more prosaic than ever, for the day is Sunday. Mr. Francis Haslop, the eminent conveyancing counsel, was at his chambers in Gray's Inn Square. He was there for what a Protestant would have regarded as a work of necessity and of mercy; but Mr. Haslop, a Catholic, would have deemed any such Sabbatarian excuse as supererogatory.

Looked at from a secular point of view, the chamber in which Mr. Haslop sat was a place which no gentleman of quiet habits could be blamed for selecting as a retreat at any time. His apartment on the first floor, was furnished with comfort and with taste, and bore less resemblance to the ordinary workshop of a busy lawyer, than to the study of a literary man who has time and inclination for cultivating the mind that is to cultivate the minds of others. The handsome and lofty room was surrounded on three sides with bookcases, filled with a slowly chosen and valuable collection of works; and the loving care of the owner was testified in the befitting bindings and in the orderly arrangement of the library. There were two doors to the room, but both were concealed, when closed, by imitations of the adjoining shelves, and the quaint ingenuity of a scholar was displayed in the imaginary titles to the non-existent books. Thickly carpeted, with here and there a deep-haired and luxurious rug, with oak and crimson furniture of the best type, with a few valuable paintings, with three old Italian cut mirrors, and with

a few choice objects either of antiquarian interest or fictile beauty, Mr. Haslop's chamber would have been pleasant at any time. It was especially pleasant on this beautiful evening of early August, when the open windows, whose sills were loaded with flowers, admitted the soft air, and allowed the owner's eyes to rest on the rich green of the garden turf. Always tranquil, this part of London assumes on the Sunday a stillness that may be felt, and the sudden and welcome cessation of certain jangling bells (yet among the unabated nuisances of our large towns), caused Mr. Haslop to give a nod of satisfaction, and to pour himself out a glass of claret from a crystal jug on a small table beside his easy chair. The chair had been in old times the property of a monastery, the table Mr. Haslop believed to have belonged to the Brinvilliers family, and the jug had what even the wary conveyancer deemed a good pedigree, and had been traced to the possession of Sir Kenelm Digby. And with most of the other furniture in the room some scrap of history was associated, for Mr. Haslop, being rich, could afford to wait for aught that he coveted, and could also afford to take it, without much heed to terms, when the opportunity came round. So when the jangle of the bells had ceased, Francis Haslop poured out his wine, and with a satisfied glance at its rich colour, held it for a moment to his lips without tasting it, and then, with eyes resting on the flowers and the green turf, slowly drank the perfumed draught. Do not judge him unkindly that he took this glass of wine complacently, luxuriously, if you will.

Francis Haslop is of somewhat spare figure, tall and graceful in manner and movement, as a man of refine-

ment who has seldom had need of hurry, and who has avoided as far as possible intercourse with others than persons of refinement. His head, though not of the highest or even the most powerful conformation, denotes ample and ready intelligence, and there is decision in the lower portion of the face. The hazel eyes are pleasantly keen, and have been proof against the interminable puzzles which it is his trade to solve and to set anew, for the golden eyeglass dangling at his button is never used when he is alone, but is merely kept as a defence to be occasionally thrown up against an antagonist. His complexion is fair, and his face entirely whiskerless. He may have been told, or have known without being told, that delicate and aristocratic features are too rare to be hidden as plebeians hide their coarse outlines. Has such a consideration weight with a gentleman of the age of fifty? But he has, in revenge, defied the fashion that crops the head to stubble, and his dark brown, rich, wavy hair, into which no line of grey has yet intruded, gives almost a picturesque character to the handsome head. His smile is not too ready, but when it comes is very pleasant, and to all appearance is devoid of that ironical expression so admired in the circles where conversation is not, however, usually over-laden with second meaning, or greatly weighted with any. Mr. Haslop's smile is frank, as is natural in those who associate with the best and the best-natured society.

There is a knock at the outside door upon the landing.

"Come, there is one virtue where I did not expect even one — punctuality," observes Mr. Haslop.

He will not push away his Brinvilliers table, and

he has no intention of offering his wine to the expected visitor, yet he would not sit in a churlish attitude even in the presence of one whom he dislikes. The old monastery chair stood stubbornly enough in its ancient chamber, but Mr. Haslop is no bigot, and, thanks to secular upholstery, it wheels round with a wish. His back is to the wine table, and he rises to admit his visitor, for Mr. Haslop's clerk is a Protestant, and devoutly observant of Sundays at Richmond. Besides, the tolerant employer does not want him now.

When the imaginary bookcase closes again, Mr. Haslop coldly but courteously requests his visitor to be seated.

The person who obeys is a man of gentlemanly dress and appearance, who looks perhaps more than thirty years of age, and is perhaps two or three years younger. He is not in the least awed by the lofty manner of the aristocratic lawyer, but is respectful, as is befitting, considering the difference of years. His look around him is an interested but not vulgarly curious gaze at the graceful features of the apartment; it is certain that he notes them more closely than is consistent with the absolute indifference held to imply that you also have been born in the purple, and that Tyrian dye has no charm of novelty for you. The stranger's eyes would perhaps first attract a stranger's notice, they are very fine, of a violet hue, and almost unpleasantly restless, or seem so in the calm of that apartment, and in presence of its tranquil master. You would next observe that the face is dark, is handsome, though with an occasional expression of fierceness, not so much called for by the business of the moment as by

some internal and recurring habit of self-assertion; and then it might occur to you that the intellectual faculties of the man would seem to promise domination over all others, save for the decided sensuousness of the mouth. The figure is slightly above middle height, is manly, even vigorous, and as the visitor, who is neatly and professionally dressed, draws off his well-fitted gloves, you perceive that the hands are large and powerful. Taken as a whole, the impression given you is favourable, but it may not be a good sign that as soon as this is proved, you are inclined to analyse and to disturb your liking.

"I should apologise to you, Mr. Vaughan, for requesting you to call on a Sunday evening, but my reasons for doing so will be my excuse."

Nothing could be more courteous than the words, but Mr. Haslop's tone scarcely accorded with them. It was not lost upon Mr. Vaughan, who replied, as from a perfect level with his host, "Pray make no apology, Mr. Haslop."

The great lawyer looked at his visitor for a moment or two, perhaps with no unkindness in his thoughts. At all events, he said, after a short pause, and with less coldness:

"To *us*, you need not be told, the day is not one of observance like that of many excellent persons in this neighbourhood, — though, by the way, I suppose that the evangelical world, like the rest of us, emigrates after business hours?"

"I suppose that most rational persons endeavour to sleep in fresh air," said Mr. Vaughan, somewhat curtly. "I do, for one."

"I trust that you succeed," said Mr. Haslop. There

may have been an under-meaning in the words, but they were said so conventionally, as to leave no excuse for reply.

"You have no partner, I think, Mr. Vaughan?" said the conveyancer, after a pause.

"I have no partner. A firm with whom you are in constant intercourse will tell you—I need, therefore, make no secret of it—that my business is not too large for my own management."

"Solicitors like to hunt in couples," said Mr. Haslop.

"Have you a partner to propose to me, Mr. Haslop?" replied Mr. Vaughan, almost haughtily, as indeed the previous speech warranted.

"I will tell you presently. Meantime will you favour me with an answer to a straightforward question, which you will believe that I put for a reason? What gentleman prepares deeds for you?"

"I prepare my own deeds," replied Mr. Vaughan, quietly.

"I am answered, of course, whether I am to understand you literally, or not."

He waited as if to learn something, at least, by the reply; but the reply was the slightest bow.

"I will explain in a few words," said Mr. Haslop, after another pause, and an earnest look at his companion. "I will explain why I have asked you to call on me, and why I have asked you the question which you have—met. You desire to borrow from a client of a firm whose papers come to me—"

"Hippisley, Cleavedon, and Lawes, Lincoln's Inn Fields," said Mr. Vaughan, as in continuation of the other's words.

"The sum of two thousand pounds," said Mr. Haslop, without noticing the interpolation.

"I made no secret to Mr. Cleavedon that the money was for myself, and there is no reason why he should not have mentioned the fact to you, Mr. Haslop. It is satisfactory to me to infer, from matters having gone so far, that you approve of the security."

"Well, I have not yet advised on the title, but I may say to you that a perfectly good one is represented by the papers before me."

"I had no reason to believe otherwise, or I should hardly have placed them in the hands of gentlemen who consult Mr. Haslop."

"You *knew* that they employed me?" said Mr. Haslop, suddenly.

"Certainly, and —"

He stopped, and then repeated "Certainly."

"You were about to say something else," said Mr. Haslop, almost eagerly. "Will you say it?"

"Yes, but without intending any further explanation. It was because I knew that you were consulted by Mr. Cleavedon's house that I decided on applying to them for the money. I have no more to say on this point," said Mr. Vaughan, composedly.

"At present," murmured Mr. Haslop, again looking wistfully at his visitor.

"The title was examined in the usual and regular manner, and all documents were found to have been accurately described by you?" said Mr. Haslop.

"They were," said Mr. Vaughan, with a slight intonation of surprise. "I presume that Mr. Cleavedon would hardly have troubled you with the papers until that formality had been gone through."

"You said that you had no partner, Mr. Vaughan," said Mr. Haslop, gravely. "May I ask whether you are a married man?"

"I am not."

"Your business, you have told me, is not large. Is it so large — and I am asking so strange a question that I think it will dispose you to give me a frank answer — is it so large as to prevent your abandoning it for other occupation, presuming you saw your way?"

"I will answer with perfect frankness — it is not. But I shall work it up, and I want this two thousand pounds as capital. I think I have spoken plainly, Mr. Haslop, but I am in the hands of a gentleman."

"It is well for you, Percy Vaughan," said Mr. Haslop, coldly, "that you are in the hands of one whose notions of duty are not restricted to what is implied in the name of gentleman. How soon can you be ready to leave England?"

"I could leave England to-morrow. I have no intention of leaving it at all," replied Mr. Vaughan, without the least manifestation of any kind.

"Let us have no idle words, Percy Vaughan. You perfectly understand me — you have understood me all along. I return those papers to Hippisley's firm on Wednesday. Shall you have left England by Tuesday night?"

"You have much more to say," replied the young solicitor.

"Nothing, now. Something if you are here to-morrow night at ten o'clock."

Percy Vaughan's nature broke out in his answer.

"I can hardly be so early, as I have a lecture to deliver at Islington."

"Might I ask its character?"

"It is upon the history of some Popes of Rome, and would scarcely command your approbation, Mr. Haslop."

Our corrupt nature must take the blame of the thing, but it is certain that a man, however good, has an utterly unjustifiable admiration for manhood, however displayed. Knowing what Mr. Haslop knew, he had no right to relax the severity of his tone, on this second repulse, and yet he only said:

"Give the lecture, and come to me when it is over. I will detain the papers one day more. One day only."

"I am not pressed for the money, Mr. Haslop, if that be your meaning."

Mr. Haslop has a self-asserting nature, too, and the fair complexion flushes and the hazel eyes shine out upon occasion, and the occasion is here. He conquers himself, however, as becomes a truly brave man, as he rises from his chair, and instead of making an angry and indignant speech, he rests a hand upon the back of the chair, and says:

"Percy Vaughan, two years ago you were living on the borders of South Wales. During your sojourn there you rendered an important service to a young lady — Magdalen Conway."

The name has been so suddenly brought out that Percy Vaughan has had no time for self-mastery, and his face breaks into a glow.

He makes no answer.

"You saved that young lady from an outrage, and her friends are mindful that you did so. They will save you, in return, from a peril that now hangs over

you, and I am ready to be their agent. Will you come to me to-morrow night at eleven, and say that you are ready to leave England?"

"If I say that I will not?"

"Do not act the madman, Percy Vaughan," said Mr. Haslop, with actual agitation. "You must go, and we throw open a gate for you — wait a few hours more and it must close against you. We would repay you the service you rendered to Magdalen Conway. We put no price upon such a service, but you wanted two thousand pounds — you shall have double the sum at ten to-morrow night. Am I to say any more?"

"Yes."

"You desire more money?"

"I do not wish to speak of that — let me ask you a question. Why am I to go?"

"Good Heaven! need I tell you to your face?"

"I wish you to do so."

"Because you are a forger."

"Yes," said Percy Vaughan, as calmly as if he had heard indifferent words; "I supposed that to be your meaning. May I ask what has led up to the suspicion which you have done me the honour to state as a fact?"

"I will tell you, but what does it matter? In forging the last deed but one of the series set out in the title you have laid before me, you were hasty or ignorant enough to use words that had not yet been adopted — you forgot the date of an Act of Parliament."

This was evidently the truth, or why did Percy Vaughan turn pale? Not with fear, but with anger — anger with himself that he should have made this false

step. But though anger will turn like the scorpion, it will not do so when there is aught else to sting.

"Who detected this?"

"I," was the calm answer.

"And you have kept the discovery to yourself?"

"We are quite alone, and there is no chance of any one entering these rooms for more than twelve hours. You are younger, and should be stronger than I am, and I take my seat in this chair," said Mr. Haslop, with calmness. "There is money in that cabinet, not so much, certainly, as I have offered you, but still a considerable sum. I have kept the secret to myself — no one else can know it but you. Are you thinking of violence? I have stated the temptations fairly, and you may think that it is better to take yonder money now than wait for the chance of my changing my mind."

The younger man made no reply for some moments, and then appeared to revert to Mr. Haslop's last words.

"Is it courageous," asked Percy Vaughan, "to use such language to me, after giving the right to say what you had said before?"

"I think it is," said Mr. Haslop, quietly. "But I have no wish to say anything to you that is not strictly necessary. We all talk too much in this world. I was wrong," he added, "and I ask your pardon. I should have remembered that you showed yourself a brave man, when, single-handed, and with no weapon but a stake snatched from a hedge, you beat off the three miners, and rescued Miss Conway."

"It is not a great matter," said Percy Vaughan, "for an active man who understands single-stick to

drive off a batch of half-drunken clowns. I did a braver thing than that, Mr. Haslop."

"I suppose that I guess your meaning."

"No one has ever had, from me, a right to guess it," replied Vaughan, earnestly, "but I tell you now, because we shall never meet again, that it was a braver thing in me to leave that neighbourhood, and see Miss Conway no more."

"If you felt it to be so, it was so," said Mr. Haslop, coldly.

"You mean that my suit would have been hopeless, that I might have stayed for any chance I had of anything but gratitude from your ward. I understand the pride which speaks to me. Perhaps you are right."

"The discussion cannot be useful. You will be here to-morrow night at eleven? After that, as you say, we shall probably not meet again."

"I will come."

He came on the following night, and very few words passed between them. Mr. Haslop placed the promised money in the hands of Percy Vaughan, refusing to take any sort of acknowledgment, and ending the interview as speedily as he could. Nothing could be less business-like than the entire transaction, as performed by one of the most regular and business-like of men. But Mr. Haslop, when alone, felt satisfied with what he had done. To hint at unsolved mysteries is a vulgar device, to make premature disclosures is an error in art, but it may be said that he knew more than we have told, but far less than we shall have to tell.

CHAPTER III.

The Octagon Club.

"O, come here a minute, Wigs — glad I caught you," said Mr. Charles Launceston to Mr. Henry Wigram, as they met, about lunch time, in the hall of the Octagon Club.

"If you're glad, I'm glad," said Mr. Wigram, in a voice which, for some reason, he usually made very melancholy, perhaps because no handsome young fellow in London had less to be unhappy about.

"Come into the smoking-room for two minutes," said Launceston, leading the way.

"You said one minute," murmured Wigram, pensively following his friend. "But never mind," he added, seating himself in the easiest of all the easy chairs in the luxurious chamber which they had entered, and taking the usual comfortable attitude which long study in such matters had taught him to discover.

"Look here, Wigs. We are going to give Ernest Dormer a dinner. You'll be in it, won't you?"

"Who's we? and why to Dormer? and why ask me?" responded Mr. Wigram, hopelessly.

"Why, you like him, don't you?"

"I don't dislike him, that I know of."

"Well, then, you'll be glad to hear that his marriage affair is settled at last, and is to come off next week."

"Why should I be glad to hear that a good fellow is going to be got rid of? Always the way. As soon as one has had time to find out that a man is worth knowing, he bolts. I thought that marriage wasn't to be?"

"It wasn't. But it has been squared. The bride's parents cannot make up their minds to part with their only child, — I know mine were uncommonly ready to part with me, but that's nothing to the purpose, — and so they have made the condition that Ernest shall settle down at Naybury. He agrees, and the event is fixed. And as I tell you, we're going to give him a sort of farewell dinner, by way of a finish to his bachelor existence."

"Here?"

"Yes."

"Might have done better for him than that," said Mr. Wigram, discontentedly. "Why didn't you go somewhere else?"

"What for? Phelps can do very well, if you give him time, and instil a few notions into him. Latrobe is going to see to all that."

"Latrobe knows nothing about a dinner."

"He thinks he does, and Jemmy Rydon is to be viceroy over him."

"Who is simply a cannibal — an infatuated cannibal. I told him so last night, when he was actually eating those infernal canvas-back ducks, done to a cinder, instead of being just shown the fire. I suppose you want to prepare poor Dormer, by degrees, for the horrors of domestic cookery. Who are the other fellows?"

"Six or eight. Let's see — there's you, and there's myself, and Sam Mangles —"

"What for?"

"Dormer and he are very intimate, went to Norway together, and all that. And Mangles is a very good fellow, except to the authors he cuts up. Then there's Milwarden —"

"To run off to a consultation in chambers, or say he does, just as things are beginning to be a little pleasant."

"Well, I can't help his having no end of business, can I, you old grumble? He'll be a judge, one of these days, and then he need not run away. Then there's Doddy Dalston, and Alford, and your friend Marsden."

"My friend? I never speak to him."

"But he speaks to you, at awful length, which is all the same. Don't say it isn't, for I heard him a night or two ago explaining the French and Austrian treaties to you in his usual luminous and exhaustive manner, and I couldn't think what you wanted to be crammed for. Horace Clyde pretended to want to bet that you were going to stand for Finsbury."

"Horace Clyde is an ass. Is he coming to the dinner?"

"Come where there's anything to pay? No, Wiggins. I asked him, for fun, and he spoke of Dormer's merits for twenty minutes, and stated that he admired Ernest to idolatry, and would have given anything to be off an engagement for that evening with some old college friends. If you like to invite him as your guest, I'll lay six to two he finds that he mistook the day of the college dinner."

"I wish he was coming, though," said Wigram, whom no arrangement exactly pleased. "He tells good stories, and never sulks if he is interrupted."

"I've told you how to get him. I don't think there's anybody else. Yes, there's a young fellow, a parson, I fancy, or thereabouts, called Grafton. Sam Mangles knows him."

"One of his contributors, I suppose. But I don't see why he should dine here because he sells ill-nature to Sam Mangles."

"That's not it. He lives in Naybury, where Dormer is going to live, and I think that Grafton, *père*, is a rector in the neighbourhood."

"Nice account the young confessor will be able to give to the ladies at Naybury about the bridegroom's friends and associates. A clever thing, your asking him, certainly."

"That's not my business, Wiggy. Besides, this club is celebrated for its virtue and morality. Now I'm going to ring for some sherry and bitters. Have some?"

"The bitters here are simply detestable, but I will have a glass of dry sherry, as they are pleased to call it. Is this match a good thing for Ernest Dormer?"

"There will be a good deal of money coming when the old folks go, I believe, but I don't imagine that they hand over much now."

"The selfishness of age — what a sad thing selfishness is. I have sometimes thought that you were inclined to be selfish, Charles. Pray eschew the habit. What is the young lady's name — I forget — begins with a C — Conroy, or thereabouts?"

"Conway. Christian name Magdalen, which I happen to know from having assisted at the purchase of divers jewels for her young ladyship."

"Conway, yes. Did I not hear something about a conversion from Popery, or to Popery, or something?"

"I think there was something of the sort, and one don't like to hear of such things. People who get

converted are usually open to other influences. I really don't know which way it was. Dormer will be comfortable enough, I suppose — he has about fourteen hundred a year, and his uncle cleared his debts, you know. And then he is not a helpless beggar without mental resources, like you. He can read a book, and understand it, and he can write reasonably well, so that he has occupation. It's a good hunting country. And I hear, too, that the girl is very nice indeed."

"Well, we'll hope for the best. Ring again, and ring like the devil. I believe that there is no house in the whole world where the servants are so long in answering the bells."

Mr. Phelps, the cook at the Octagon, was on his mettle. His predecessor, a splendid Frenchman, had been adored by the female domestics, but obnoxious to the quieter members of the club, by reason of his utter and avowed contempt for any gentleman who ordered a mutton chop. Many men like mutton chops, and those who do are usually long-suffering, but very determined when they take action. The Octagon men rebelled, and insulted the Committee. The Committee were individually haughty, but as a body, submissive, and the French artist was discharged, nominally on the ground that the club-maidens found him too fascinating for the moralities. He took this as a compliment, and retired gracefully. The Englishman's testimonials were admirable, and men do not give a testimonial to a cook with the lavish and unconscientious profusion of laudation which one puts into a letter intended to help a clerical or medical friend into a responsible office. It was not denied that Mr. Phelps lacked some of the higher attributes of a cook, but if

unimaginative, he was earnest, and a true, if not an inspired artist. He took office, but was made to understand that the Committee would be severe and perhaps unfriendly watchers of his policy. Happily for himself, he had both nerve and ambition, and he was sustained by the confidence of the middle classes in the club, to whose opinions he made no secret of his belief that much deference ought to be shown. He gave special attention to the mutton chops.

Launceston, who was on the Committee, and who belonged to the high epicurean party, had all a gentleman's sense of justice; and though, as we have heard, he was not inclined to be enthusiastic, he had even taken the trouble to hold a conference with Mr. Phelps touching the banquet in question, and had imparted to the cook some valuable hints, besides an intimation that this dinner would probably settle his *status* in the judgment of his patrons. The soul of the artist was touched, he thanked Launceston, but not with unworthy humility, and resolved, in the language of a sterner art than his own, to do all that he knew. He showed that he knew a great deal.

The party assembled, and it happened that though collected with reference to Ernest Dormer's position rather than to the liking of the various men for one another, the gathering was a good and a representative gathering. Most of the fellows had a specialty, and few bored the others with it. Mr. Mangles, the editor of a critical journal, and one of its best writers, was appointed to be the chief of the feast, because on that occasion it would be necessary to make a little speech in honour of the guest, and Mr. Mangles was great at little speeches. He was an exceedingly good-hearted

man, always doing kindnesses in a private way, and executing his public victims as matter of business and without either malice or mercy. If you were a poet, or a novelist, or a historian, he would utterly ruin — or instruct one of his brilliant myrmidons to ruin — your play, tale, or romance, if he deemed it meet, the week after he had dined with you, and floated French anecdotes to you through smoke until three in the morning. But if you were in a scrape of any kind, or if there were illness in your house, he would drive over London until that or any other hour in the morning to hunt up friends, or doctors, or anybody whom you thought could be useful, and his cheque-book was as ready as his kind words. Outsiders, who knew nothing of his good nature, believed him to be an incarnation of cruelty, sent on earth for the destruction of rising talent, and his friends, who understood him, could not be expected to be always expounding his merits — friends do not exert themselves much to such ends — so Mr. Mangles bore an unfavourable reputation, far and wide. This he bore very easily, he made a great deal of money, and, being a bachelor, he lived pleasantly and wrote unpleasantly in the most comfortable of chambers in Lincoln's Inn Fields. His tall thin figure, keen features, and unsympathetic manner might have made it probable, as times go, that he was the husband of some very pretty and affectionate little woman who worshipped him, and doubtless he might have been, had he so chosen, but he did not choose to be worshipped, and certainly worshipped nobody.

There is not much more to say of Mr. Charles Launceston than we have already said, in recording that gentleman's conversation with his friend. He had

been in the army, and had seen some service, but had retired with the intention of marrying a young lady who had accepted him, and having then seen somebody whom she thought she liked better, had evaded the disagreeable duty of telling Launceston this except by eloping with the gentleman whom she preferred. Charley Launceston was chiefly enraged, because Mary Woolnott's irregular behaviour had caused him to disarrange his life to no purpose. His friends consoled him with the epigrams always made upon a girl who elopes, and with the prophecies which as regularly attend such an event, and Charley was readily comforted, and gave himself to billiards. Everybody liked him. It has been said that nearly all the guests on this occasion had specialty. Charley Launceston was an exception, unless we may reckon as an accomplishment his unrivalled power of giving nicknames at the shortest notice. Some of them stuck.

Mr. Milwarden was a handsome, very bright-eyed, and very pleasant-tongued barrister, who was rising rapidly. Foreseeing that he would, as Launceston had said, become a judge, and having observed that some of our excellent judges have fallen into error for want of practical knowledge of life, Mr. Milwarden, with a prudence hardly to have been expected in one so young, was taking pains to familiarise himself with all kinds of life, daily, and likewise nightly. The unthinking might suppose that he was only amusing himself and gratifying an energetic and buoyant nature, when they met him at all sorts of places and at all sorts of hours, but he was always ready with the gravest explanation, that a lawyer can never tell what sort of knowledge may not be useful to him. Like Bacon, he said he held all know-

ledge to be his province. Milwarden's readiness and presence of mind were rare gifts. To see him, after a clamorous supper-party at chambers, throw down his cards and cigar, and suddenly address himself to stupid and earnest law talk on a remote sofa, was to be convinced that his future would be just what he pleased to make it. He made his present as crowded and exciting a day as is good for a gentleman of thirty.

The other London guests may just be "observed," as the reporters say. Doddy Dalston — let us save the honour of his sponsors by mentioning that he was christened Theodore — was not thought to have much imagination; but if he had a dim idea of a future state, it was held that Doddy's visions were of some place where nobody has to pay debts. His earthly power of incurring obligations of the kind, notoriously never meeting them, and yet of always looking like a gentleman, and having money for everybody but creditors, amounted to a financial and social miracle. His utter ruin had long ceased to be matter of prediction and had taken its place in history; but there Doddy sat, exceedingly well dressed, and listening with an air of complacency to solvent men, and as if his only doubt was whether he should buy the house which one of them wished to sell, or to beg the other to invest the money for him in Madagascar Passives. Moreover, whether Doddy Dalston got hold of his money by burglaries, as some of his friends insisted, or by picking the pockets of bankers' clerks in the City, as others contended, he got it, and never sponged. It need not be said, therefore, that Dalston was much liked. So was Jemmy Rydon, for other causes, the most salient perhaps being the capital parties which he

was fond of giving at a certain secluded villa in a north-western suburb, where Mr. Rydon, who always intended to marry, but never did, was rehearsing domesticity. So was little Walter Latrobe, because he had been a gallant soldier, and in an emergency had held a fort with a handful of men against a raging mob of Indian niggers, and with his own small white hand had sent a dozen of them to Padalon, before the relieving force of cavalry came down to the slaughter. He had a gentle feminine voice, and was loved of women for his beauty and valour, and of children, because his business in life was the invention of child-games. It may be that he was wicked at odd hours. Then there was the instructive Dick Marsden, who knew everything, and the indolent Tom Alford, who knew nothing, and the remaining type was Willy Daines, who went in for politics, and was always standing for some place or other, and always losing because he made his agents leave off bribing just at the point when another three hundred pounds would have sent their principal into the British Legislature.

The Reverend Edward Grafton, who had been invited by Mr. Mangles, for the reasons which we have heard imparted in the Launceston fashion, will be heard of hereafter, and it is not desirable to keep the dinner waiting while we enter into his history, or his character. He appeared to the rest of the party in the guise of a tall, slight, fresh-coloured young clergyman, who had a good deal to say, but not the art which enables a man to bring out what is in him. He coloured a little in speaking, spoke too long when he got an innings, and waited too long to get one. Two or three of the party noticed that he took wine somewhat too

fast, and that late in the dinner he was inclined to echo the words of others, and express himself captiously thereabout. These small signs might merely indicate that the young clergyman had not had time to become a man of the world.

Nor will we, as yet, say much more of the chief guest of the evening, Ernest Dormer, than could have been said next day by any of those who dined with him. Let him disclose his character for himself as he goes through life. It is only in novels that you are given so tremendous an advantage over a new acquaintance as is comprised in your reading his biography before you meet. Let us, being among gentlemen, play more fairly. Nobody at that table, except Mr. Mangles, knew much about Ernest Dormer, popular as he was at the club that was thus affectingly bidding him farewell. Everybody was always glad to see the handsome, easy-mannered, frank-spoken man, of two or three and thirty, who could talk horses and salmon and ballet with the light-minded, but had an eye for the *Indépendance Belge*, and the British division lists, and could not only quote Horace, but had, on occasion, proved that he knew Greek. He was ready with good stories and sayings, discreet or less discreet, by other people, and he was able, without manifest effort, to say a reasonably smart thing of his own. He always spoke kindly of women, in fact, so charitably that pious women did not believe he had any religion. He was not, however, reluctant to say unkind things of men, but it was in a way which seemed to imply that this was only the conventional mode of showing one's clear-sightedness — the world did not believe that Ernest Dormer was malicious. He dressed well, if somewhat

under the mark at which man becomes angel in the eyes of the teens, but he could afford this, for his fine well-set head, with rich auburn hair, bright Saxon eyes, clean-cut lip, some little temper hinted there, — and gallant bearing, made him a notable in most companies of the somebodies. Tall, well made, not obtrusively active in movement, but with a frame which gave evidence of power, Ernest Dormer was a capital specimen of the English gentleman, who is neither an epicurean nor an athlete. When in London he rode, but shot no pigeons and pulled in no boats. When in the country, with friends, he took the field sports easily, never coming to grief, but rivalling no groom or gamekeeper, and, so far as his friends knew, his gambling was limited to a few mild bets in the great races, and a readiness to back his habitual good luck at whist. Of his private life his intimate friends knew only what has been hinted, namely, that he had certainly got into debt, and had lately been helped out of it. Charley Launceston, who liked him very much, nevertheless declared, photographically, that he was a very successful Negative, but Charley did not know everything.

We are grateful to some old novelists, especially that disagreeable Scotchman, Mr. Tobias Smollett, for recording the conversations of our ancestors. Not that the conversations themselves are worth much, but that they show those venerated persons in their natural manner, and not instructive, patriotic, or sentimental. It may be supposed — though we try to repel the idea — that a hundred years hence our club talk will seem as pert and in as bad taste as the tavern dialogues which Tobias has given us. I apprehend that there

is no remedy for this. We write or speak vainly, if in the belief that our tone is better than that of our grandfathers, or in the hope that it will be more acceptable to our grandchildren. One does not know by what sarcastic word they will ridicule our old-fashionedness and dulness; one does not know whether, a hundred years hence, it will be the thing to be very refined or very coarse. But we may be assured that in either case we shall be contemptuously dealt with, even as we have dealt with all those who have gone before us. Let us defy posterity, *d'avance*, and speak as free Britons.

"Study your dinner, gentlemen," said Mr. Mangles. "Having had nothing to do with ordering it, I may be allowed to say that the document before each of you shows an effort of high art, for which labour we are much indebted to two persons, or shall I say parties, now present."

"What's the objection to the word party?" said Milwarden. "I admit that it is used in the diplomacy of plebeians, but it is a good word, indicating an interest. Person is a feeble abstraction."

"You speak as a mere lawyer, Milwarden," said Wigram, in his melancholy voice.

"Don't talk of mere lawyers as if they were black-beetles, Mr. Wigram, but pass the cayenne."

"Cayenne to that! Latrobe and Rydon, overlook the insult to yourselves, and let us ask the waiters not to tell Phelps."

"Or rather," said Rydon, solemnly, "let him be told that it was only Milwarden who could so trample on an artist's feelings. I have always held that the law is a brutalising profession."

"One has heard the sentiment," said Milwarden, composedly, "chiefly, however, from vexatious defendants and prisoners whose alibis have broken down."

"It's too early in the dinner for talk," said the gentle Walter Latrobe.

"Especially chaff," said the instructive Dick Marsden. "In fact, with any stranger present, I submit that this sort of thing, which the interlocutors appear to think repartee, be remitted to the smoking room. Mr. Grafton, I assure you that there is not that absolute lack of sense here which you would infer from the tone of these gentlemen."

The young clergyman was not ready with a reply to the half-banter of the serious looking Marsden, but Mangles was always ready.

"Rather thank Mr. Grafton, as the representative of a virtuous country village, that Dormer is to be removed there, before he gets mentally demoralised."

"You'll keep in the club, Dormer, I hope?" said Tom Alford.

One or two listened for the answer.

"My subscription is paid, you know, several months in advance," said Ernest Dormer, "so I have time for consideration."

He had not answered the question, and the clergyman, who had expected an instant reply in the negative, looked up at him involuntarily. Ernest knew why, and at once added, laughing,

"I don't think that they'll see much more of me here, Edward."

"I should think not," said the priest, simply.

"The engaged men always say that," said Mr. Rydon, jollily, yet with a certain faint malice. "I

have heard the vow till I know it by heart, and it is kept like a good many other vows."

"Rydon, as a moralist of the first class, a Sir Galahad of the Wood of St. John, is entitled to be severe on us who only try to be good," said Ernest Dormer, as pleasantly, and quite as meaningly.

"I hear you," said Rydon, who was really good-natured. "Well, Willy Daines, how are your politics? Quite well? I saw a brougham at your door yesterday, and fancied it was Mr. Brand's. Are they going to put you in anywhere?"

"I have not heard of it," said Mr. Daines, "but it would be a delicate attention on the part of the Cabinet."

"You lost Mutford, I think?" said Marsden, in his curt unfeeling way, not that he meant to hurt feelings, but having none of his own, he never recognised anybody else's. "You were nearly in, I believe, but came to grief in a hurry?"

"I resigned when I saw that I could not go on without the use of means which — which I did not intend to use," said Mr. Daines.

But Marsden meant to say his say, and though he was not at all intimate with Daines, and though he was annoying that unlucky candidate very much, he went on.

"Bosh, my dear fellow, we all know about that. A man who is in the Home Office told me exactly what was spent on both sides. The joke of it is that it is a matter of certainty that if you had not been frightened and thrown up the sponge at two, the other man would have given in at a quarter past. He makes no secret of it."

"In that case you have a right to tell it," said Mr. Daines, enraged. "And I have a right to say that I don't believe a word of it."

"But consider, my dear Daines," said Milwarden, smiling, "how much more enviable is your position than that of your guilty opponent. He boasts a victory bought with gold, whilst you are proud of a defeat —"

"Bought with bank-notes," said Launceston.

"Hush," said Milwarden. "At the same time I regret the result, because had Daines been returned, and petitioned against, as he would certainly have been, I think his regard for me would have been shown in a brief."

"You were certainly wrong to retire as you did," persisted Marsden the pachydermatous. "At least they all say so, and that they expected you would show more pluck."

"Expected that he would stand more plucking," said Launceston.

"I fear you are frivolous, Launceston," said Mr. Mangles. "Some wine? I say I fear you are frivolous. I wish you would read some books, and purify your mind from old jokes."

"I like that," returned Launceston, "when it is the business of your life and that of your accomplices to prove that no books are worth reading."

"The reply was prompt," said Mangles, serenely, "but I could probably make a few selections, of a rudimentary character, that might enable you to commence an education."

"I'll come to you for it to-morrow, Samuel, my son," laughed Launceston; "and as I shall come at

lunch time, have out that famous Amontillado of yours. Have you tasted that fellow's Amontillado, Doddy?"

"No," said Theodore Dalston, "but I don't believe it's better than mine," he added, as doggedly as if he were a millionaire.

"We'll have two competitive lunches, then," said the radiant Launceston. "Doddy against Sammy, at the competitors' rooms and expense, and everybody here shall come and judge between them. That is the English, manly way of settling a dispute, eh?" he said, looking defiantly round as if the proposition had been assailed. "Tom Alford, and Henry Milwarden, charge yourselves with the execution of this decree."

"Have you seen Gracie Clare in the *Demon and the Dumpling*, Alford?" asked Mr. Rydon.

"Never heard of the play. What is it?" was the reply.

"The play's a burlesque, if you know what that is."

"Yes, I know what that is."

"I don't believe he does," said Milwarden. "On your oath, did you ever see a burlesque, Thomas Alford? and be cautious, because your words will be taken down. Don't hurry, but mind and speak the truth."

"You all chaff me because I don't go to the theatres much," returned Mr. Alford, "but I never heard any of you come in from one of them without declaring that he never heard such bosh in the course of his life. Why should I bore myself?"

"Rydon," said Milwarden, "I see you are unequal to the reply — excuse me for taking it out of your hands. Alford, have you no duties to society? Is everything to be determined by your selfishness? Could a community

hold together if all men followed your rule? Do you ever dine out? Can you sit by a young lady at dinner for five minutes, and not be asked the question which Rydon asked you, or something cognate thereto? Do you know what cognate means? Do not confound it with cognac, which is coming round."

"The theatre bores me, I tell you," said the unmoved Tom Alford. "First, it gives me a headache. Secondly, there are no pieces worth hearing. Thirdly, there are no actors worth seeing. Fourthly, I hate to dine early. Fifthly, I hate to dress. And sixthly, they won't let you smoke, even between the acts."

"Orson is endowed with reason, after all," said Latrobe. "I never go, if I can help it, except to take children. That's fun, if you like."

"Yes, that's your weakness, I know," said Dalston. "I tried it, I am sure, in good faith. I took my sister's children, when she was out of town, to see *Frankenstein* and the *Castle Spectre*, and she would not speak to me for three months. I give you my word the creatures screeched till we were nearly turned out of the theatre. How I hated them just then, and they are pretty little things too."

"By Jove," said Walter Latrobe (only he made a stronger appeal and meant it), "you ought to have been hanged."

"Very likely," said Doddy, "all in good time. I say, Latrobe, you know the Sylehams, I think?"

"I am happy to say yes. Lady Syleham's two youngest girls are the loveliest children in the whole world."

"Not prettier than my nieces, I'll bet. But the girl I am going to speak of is not exactly a child, that is,

she may be nineteen or so. I saw her at the Zoological on Sunday."

"That must be Isabella, the second daughter. The eldest is married. Who was she with?"

"Fat party in velvet, garrulous, over-dressed, and asthmatic."

"I don't know. Lady Syleham is a lady, and looks one."

"Never mind, I bear no malice against Miss Isabella for having been so accompanied. She would atone for an uglier guy of a chaperone. I say, by Jove, what an awfully lovely complexion!"

"Isn't it rather? And such sweet eyes."

"There is a clergyman present, gentlemen," said Mr. Mangles.

"I wish he could be present at a brief but significant interview between the lady we speak of and myself," said Doddy Dalston. "I suppose you couldn't introduce me, Latrobe the brave."

"Not brave enough for that," said the soldier in his gentlest voice.

"I fear you share the common want of faith in my financial attitude," said Dalston, archly. "It is strangely difficult to be appreciated in this world."

"The error will probably be corrected in the next," said Milwarden, judicially, "for which reason, prisoner, it is charitable to wish you many happy returns of the day."

Edward Grafton would probably have felt it his duty to make some remark on this levity, but he was engaged in talk with Mangles, who amused himself by sounding the young clergyman in reference to M. Renan,

whose sentimental star had just appeared in the theological horizon.

"I have not read the book. I don't want to read it," said Mr. Grafton. "In fact," he said simply, "I don't read French with any comfort. But I have seen it described, and I have had extracts before me, and I know enough of it to be clear, that M. Renan is a detestable infidel."

"*Convictus atque combustus*," said Milwarden, gravely.

"Yes, I would burn the book," said the young clergyman, colouring, but not abashed. "I am aware that anything like earnestness in such matters is out of fashion, but," he added, vehemently, "if I would crush a viper that was going to poison the body of my child, why should I not crush out a book that might poison his soul?"

It may be taken for fact that never in the history of the Octagon Club had member or stranger pronounced words of this kind within the walls. It spoke well for the good manners of the audience that nobody smiled, or even looked surprised. I doubt whether a prayer meeting would have behaved as politely had a spectator suddenly appealed to the Koran.

"I am not defending M. Renan," said Mr. Mangles, as soon as he could bring his mind back into its habitual mood of gentlemanly cynicism. "I think the work as weak as water. Speaking only as to matter of taste, we do not wish to see the Veil decked with tinsel. But," he went on, not exactly knowing what to say, "ought we not to respect faith, even when only a grain of mustard seed?"

"Not French mustard," said Ernest Dormer.

And the speech, not over-reverent, relieved the

party, for it gave them an excuse for a laugh, and theology passed away. But the memory of that young clergyman's speech came back in after days to some who forgot it when their surprise had gone by.

The good wine of the Octagon did its work, and man after man unthawed, lost his mannerism, and talked hard and fast. Latrobe, whom nothing ever excited, except some case of cruelty to a child, was one of the two who maintained his composure, yet even he occasionally raised that small white hand which had been dyed so red in his Indian fray, and sought to make his gentle voice heard amid the strife of tongues. The rest flew at all game, and discussed public and private characters, men, women, books, pictures, politics, and scandal, with that perfect freedom of language which is found only among London men of a certain type. There was some wit, some humour, but a certain reckless decision in pronouncing sentence was the special feature of that debate, and Edward Grafton, in spite of his college experiences, was astounded at the promptness with which that party of self-reliant and unhesitating judges gave the doom in all and everything that came before them. The other quiet man was Ernest Dormer, who heard them all, but answered few. Perhaps he was thinking that he should hear little more of that fiery talk when he should have accepted the conditions imposed by the parents of his bride.

CHAPTER IV.

Magdalen's Home.

It may be doubted whether the novelist who works elaborately upon the description of scenery and other external objects is not rather complying with tradition, or with his own sense of his art, than earning the attention or the gratitude of his reader. Rare indeed is the faculty of effectively dealing with nature and with the additions which man has made to her handiwork, and even more rare is the habit of patient heed to each successive touch by which the picture is made to approach completion. There have been mighty masters in their department of art, who by a few bold strokes suddenly impress upon you the character of the scene into which they hurry you; and there are still among us those who by close and exquisite painting compel you to follow detail after detail, and who have the power to delay the reader from the stronger excitement of narrative. But unless we have to conduct him into regions of grandeur, or into those whose extreme beauty must not be unrecognised, it may be more than questionable whether the writer who would please should not leave the reader to please himself in the realisation of localities. It may be safely asserted that the majority of readers will do so, without over-nice attention to the stage-directions of the author, and will, upon general hints from the latter, freely draw upon their own memories or constructive power. Hence it may be that our forefathers were not so unwise, in the matter, as this enlightened age knows them to be upon all others. Our ancestors of the writing sort told us that Mr. Bountiful resided in a

beautiful but retired village in the western part of the kingdom, and that Lady Wishfort, disgusted with life, took refuge in a rocky district of the north, the ruggedness of which she found akin to her misfortunes, and our ancestors of the reading sort devised their own arrangement of beauties and ruggednesses, and were not ungrateful. The critics of other days kindly awarded high praise for a nice Observation of Nature, in cases where a reference to the praised observer's work will show how very slightly he intruded his objectivities. It will be subject of regret to the present writer should any less kindly critic of the present day intimate an opinion that this prelude is but an excuse for non-conscientious work. I trust that such a censor will be able to forgive himself, when he shall have visited the place to which I am about to invite him.

Naybury is a small quiet town in the very middle of England. The steep hill on which it is built is the hard idea which arises when the place is named. Otherwise, it is remarkable for little, except the crookedness of the road up that hill, at the top of which are the ruins of a castle. This hold, after housing a forgotten series of stronghanded and not always ill-conditioned aristocrats, went to wreck under the blow of King Oliver. Thenceforth, Naybury castle gave shelter to no person worse or better than an occasional tramp who might scale the old wall, and sleep away his tipsy hours in what once was a great kitchen. The owl succeeded to the chaplain, and the sparrowhawk to the lord. The castle, and a church, in which the patriotic wardens have for years done their best to avenge the Norman conquest by persistent injury to the beautiful Norman architecture, are the features of Naybury. The

weary pedestrian, and the wearier horse may take closer note of the long and crooked hill. It is called Naybury Street, and winds upwards, for about three-quarters of a mile as you approach from the east, and at last brings you to the foot of the off-lying eminence crowned by the ruins. It is a heart-breaking road to ascend, from the east, and there is a knee-breaking road to descend on the other side of the town. Visitors are usually conducted to the extreme top of the hill, because, as they are informed, they can thence see a long way, and this is a truth, but with the discovery that it is so, the advantages of the ascent appear, to common-place minds, to end. You see a long way, and on a very clear day, just about the point where vision begins to fail, you may notice to the west something which, if not a cloud, is the beginning of some hills. But, generally speaking, your view is over a flat country, here and there divided by a narrow stream, here and there relieved by a church spire; and if you gaze for a long time on this scenery, as few persons are known to do, there grows upon you a conviction that you have seen this long, dull flat before. But you cannot tell where, and you tease your memory with questions until bed-time, when, if you have partaken of supper, and have not walked the after-mile, which those stupid ancestors of ours prescribed, you will have the nightmare. Then, in struggling in vain across wide plains, with the avenger of blood behind you on an elephant, you will feel that you have miles and miles to run in your patent leather boots, and that you will miss the express train that is to take you to be married directly, and you know you have the key of the wine-cellar, and all your

guests are waiting to go down to dinner on your birthday, and the Speaker of the House of Commons is calling wildly to you, in the very worst of language, to put in your false teeth and answer Mr. Bright, and your boots have suddenly become old slippers, which fall off every moment, and your wife is making signs that you must instantly go up in the balloon with her, or abandon her to Peter the Great for ever, and still you cannot make any progress, you wake up gurgling a very wrong kind of word, and instantly know that in previous nightmares you have seen the view from Naybury Castle.

In the long, crooked street are some of the houses of other days, where the beams were exhibited to show the honesty of the builders, and between these houses are hideous cottages, run up by local and modern builders, in connection with whose work one thinks less of honesty than of bad drainage and extortionate rent. There are three or four inns, possibly looking worse than they are, and a low-browed shop belonging to the only tradesman in flesh, who, by reason of his monopoly, is, like Richard the Third, tyrant and butcher. Some other reasonably decent shops may be found, but they are not ostentatious. Just at the lower end of the town, beside a clear stream that runs below the hill, is the red shaft of a small factory, which supplies London with some of its felt, and turns out on Naybury a mass of stunted, sallow, slatternly girls, whose loud and vicious talk defies all remonstrance and tract-distribution.

Again ascending the hill, and passing through the greater part of the town, you observe a large and handsome red brick house, of the time of Queen Anne,

It stands back a considerable distance from the road, and some fine trees nearly screen it from the view. But if you walk up to the close, green, wood palings, and look over them and between the trees, you will see a large and carefully-kept garden, with much sward and many evergreens, and if it be summer time you will notice a wealth of bright flowers, and the vision will be all the more welcome as being the first pleasant thing which you have seen in Naybury, except the faces of many dirty but very healthy children. But, if you please, you shall by-and-by be enabled to see that handsome house without the questionably civil process of examining it over the palings.

There is a charming breakfast-room at the back of the house, and looking, with a single large window, upon another garden, even more daintily kept than that in the front. The window is open, and from the top of his cage, which has been placed on a smoothly-shaven little lawn, very fresh and green, a lazy parrot occasionally peeps into the room, and encourages its inmates by a slight croak of satisfaction at the general aspect of affairs. A beautiful Persian cat, with the mildest of eyes and the largest of tails, watches the bird, and evidently wonders why he cannot sit still and enjoy that sweet warm morning, instead of fidgiting from wire to wire without object or purpose. In some other cages, of pretty device, and suspended from trees, are a few love-birds and wax-bills, and a couple of ringdoves are in a larger cage on a stand. A garden-chair, placed in the shade, but very near the zoological group, has lately been tenanted, for there is a book upon the seat, and a sunshade lies on the grass; but there is no one in the garden at the moment.

In the room are two persons. These are Mr. and Mrs. Conway, husband and wife, parents of Magdalen Conway, of whom we have heard. The house is theirs. There is little that is remarkable in the externals of either. Mrs. Conway is a gentle-looking lady, with calm eyes, and a few silver streaks in her hair. The pleasant face, though it has been in the world for some fifty-five years, is but slightly lined, and the lips, which are pretty, are very ready to smile. Mrs. Conway's voice is light, and it is manifest that she is blessed with that best of all good gifts, habitual cheerfulness. She is very simply dressed, but unless her lady's maid have skill, it is certain that the very becoming morning dress, worn by the matron, was not made in Naybury, and the fastenings at breast and wrist are in too good taste not to have been costly. Mr. Conway is enveloped in a very large and full morning gown, so that his costume gives no key to his vocation, and a white cravat is worn by men of various callings. He is nearly seven years older than his wife, and looks many years older, and the restless eye and unquiet gesture would show that he has not been in the habit of taking the world easily, even if an occasionally impatient tone did not break into the conjugal conference. If he were to rise, you would see that he is tall, and but for the ample gown you would notice that he is slight, and has been active — perhaps is so yet. He holds a handsome paper-knife, of mother-of-pearl, and if Mrs. Conway has a trouble, it is a fear that he will break this weapon if he slaps it so hard upon the table, and she would like to take it away from him, but knows better than to do that.

“Well, it is a risk.”

"Everything is a risk, dear, to a certain extent."

"The respective speakers need hardly be indicated. Mr. Conway replied,

"Yes, of course, Mary. But there are risks that one may run, and take one's chance, and others that ought to give us pause."

"Give you what, dear?" said Mrs. Conway, quietly. She was not very well read, perhaps, in Shakspearian literature.

"Make us hesitate!" said Mr. Conway, looking round at her sharply, and then looking away again.

"Yes, certainly," said Mrs. Conway.

"What do you say?" asked her husband. "I mean, what do you say after what we have heard? You have formed an opinion, I suppose, just as I have done."

"I do not know that I have," replied Mrs. Conway. "It does not seem to me that there is anything to fidget about."

"Fidget is hardly the word, my dear Mary, when we are talking of the happiness of Magdalen. I know you did not mean it rudely to me."

"Yes, I think you might know that, William," said Mrs. Conway, "or I have been talking to you to very little purpose for thirty years. But you *are* inclined — well, I will not say to fidget, but to vex your mind with matters which are not important. At least I think so."

"I dare say I do. And, generally speaking, I wish I did not. But this is a subject which requires the utmost consideration."

"You always say that of everything, William."

"I do not. But as the child's mother, you ought to feel with me in this, and consider it with me in all its bearings."

"My dear William, I am sure that I love Magdalen as well as you can, but when we have so completely made up our minds that she is to marry Mr. Dormer, and the lawyers have made out the settlement, I do not think that we have a right to begin to hesitate unless we have something before us much more serious than the talk of a foolish young curate."

"Grafton is not a fool."

"I did not say that he was, and when I said foolish I only meant in regard to London gentlemen and their ways. He is a clever person in some things, and would be much cleverer if he would have more confidence in himself and not suppose that everybody is laughing at him, and that he deserves it. But I should not take his opinion upon the characters of persons whom he knows very little about, and has met only at dinner."

"The fact is, Mary, that you like the marriage, and don't want to hear anything against it."

"If I did not like Ernest Dormer, would I give my consent to his having Magdalen?"

"But I think that you are rather too ready in giving your liking, Mary."

"I was once," said Mrs. Conway, "but that was thirty years ago and more."

"My old darling," said her husband, as quick with his glance of affection as he had been with that of impatience. And the wife returned the glance with her calm loving look, and again felt that she should like to take away the mother-of-pearl paper-knife, and that this would be a safe time — but she did not.

"Grafton was certainly much shocked at the tone of

the society in which he found Dormer," said Mr. Conway, after a pause.

"It speaks well for Ernest," said the wife (a mother is not long after a daughter in seizing one's Christian name), "that he made no secret of his friendships, but at once brought Mr. Grafton into the very heart of the society, though he must have known that Mr. Grafton would repeat all that he heard. You cannot say that this was not bold and frank."

"Frank to carelessness, perhaps. He may have thought himself so sure of Magdalen that he did not mind what was said."

"Is not that unkind, William?"

"Well, perhaps it is. But I suppose that I may say that he did not think that Grafton would make any report at all."

"Not after what Ernest knew of Mr. Grafton's affection for Maggie?"

"Did he know of the offer?"

"Certainly. I thought it right to desire Maggie to tell him, though I am sure she would have done so without being advised."

"Then my case is strengthened, because Dormer would feel that a high-minded gentleman would be especially silent about a successful rival."

"Yes, dear, and that is to believe, as I know you do, that Ernest is himself a high-minded gentleman, or he would not feel in that way. Come, papa, do not try to prejudice yourself against him. He appears to me, as he did from the first, to be all that Magdalen can require to make her happy, and that is all which we have to live for, dear."

"Yes."

"You say yes," said his wife after a pause, "but I know that you continue to torment yourself, and that is not fair to me. I wish I quite understood what you see in Mr. Grafton's story to make you distrustful of Ernest Dormer."

"I will not go so far as to say that I am distrustful. But what Grafton said certainly opened my eyes to a new view of Dormer's character."

"But has it done that? All I can learn, for Mr. Grafton did not choose to talk to me, but kept his confidence for you, which I do not know that I thank him for —"

"Now it is you who are prejudiced. It was surely the most delicate and becoming thing, considering what he had to say, to come to me, or rather to meet me, and relate his impressions."

"Well, may be so. I don't like tale-bearers."

"Do you call a person a tale-bearer who, without any interest in the matter, tells you something that may affect the happiness of your child? Can a woman be just, even by miracle?"

"Yes, William. But I hate tale-bearers, for all that. And answer me this. Had he anything to say against Ernest himself? A man, and especially a young man, cannot help having a few gay acquaintances, and when they get together, he cannot shut their mouths, can he, or ought he to be answerable for what they say? No doubt that these young men did talk in a very wild way, and perhaps some of them may have been no better than they ought to be, though, as I said, I don't think Mr. Grafton is very capable of judging. But even he, with all his desire to injure Ernest —"

"You have no right to say that, Mary. He loved

Magdalen well enough to offer to marry her, and you may fairly credit him with a genuine desire for her welfare."

"I dare say it may be so," replied the wife, "though it does not look like desire for a girl's welfare to sow dissension between her parents and her intended. But did Mr. Grafton accuse Ernest of anything more than dining in the room where much very profane and improper talk went on?"

"He makes no charge, I tell you —"

"How could Ernest help being there, when the dinner was got up in his honour by others? He had not the inviting of a single guest, except Mr. Grafton, who makes such a grateful return."

"Grafton was not Dormer's guest, but was asked by a Mr. Mangles, with whom he has business connections."

"Well, then, Ernest asks nobody at all, but because a cluster of persons, not of his choice or selection, sit down with him and behave themselves ill, Mr. Grafton is to come down here expressly to make mischief."

"My dear Mary, come down here, as if his father's place were three miles from this house!"

"He did not meet you in his father's place. I tell you that he is a spiteful young man, and that he preserves the memory of his rejection by Magdalen, and is glad to revenge himself; and a nice person he is to be a clergyman, but that is always the way with them, they do mean things because they know that they cannot be called to account."

"A speech, Mary, of which you will be heartily ashamed when you come to think over the characters

of the clergy whom we know. But you have quite, as becomes a woman, walked away from the real question. It is not whether Grafton behaved from one motive or another, in describing what he heard, but whether Ernest Dormer is to be known by his associates, and whether we are to believe that he is an immoral infidel."

"What words to use of Magdalen's intended husband!"

"I did not use them of him — how you women pervert everything — but I do say that immorality and infidelity made the talk at that dinner, and the talkers were the select friends of Dormer — the special friends who liked him so well that they got the dinner up. Now, you can't cavil at that, and in such a matter as Maggie's happiness, we ought to let in no cavil at all."

"My dear William, do you think that if I did not believe Ernest to be what he should be, I would argue with you a moment, except as to the best means of breaking the match off. But I really cannot see that a young man is to be condemned and discarded because his club friends, on a particular occasion, talk foolishly, and wickedly if you will. Perhaps they did it on purpose, for the sake of astonishing Mr. Grafton, and though this would have been very reprehensible, it would have been very like young men."

"I see," said Mr. Conway, with a sort of groan.

This was, as may be supposed, but the sequel of a series of discussions which an affectionate father and mother had held upon a subject so important to them, and to one whom they held dearer than anything in the world. It will suffice, however, to show the way

in which each regarded the approaching marriage. Mr. Conway had more misgivings than his wife, but then it had been his way all through life to vex himself with the contemplation of the possible failure of every scheme to which he had reason to wish success, and he was not the man to abandon that habit when the scheme before him was for the happiness of his only child. His wife had, constitutionally, the opposite habit, and it had been well for Mr. Conway that it was so, or he would have been unhappy instead of restless through life. Fortunate in meeting a helpmate who was so eminently calculated to sweeten his destiny, he had gradually yielded to her influence, and learned to look with her hopeful eyes, to an extent which he would not in earlier days have believed possible, and which in moments of solitary murmuring he found himself inclined to call irrational. For there could be no doubt that, intellectually, Mr. Conway was very much the superior of his calm and cheerful wife, nor did she doubt it, though her instincts had served her so much better than his wisdom.

He had been an architect, and had achieved some successes in his art, but at a time when it was not so well understood, or at least not so irritatingly criticised as in our happy day. Had he possessed more confidence in himself and his fortunes, he would have pushed his way to fortune, and could then, had complacency been in his nature, have complacently read the information with which he would have been liberally supplied that his Gothic was only tolerable in comparison with his execrable Classic. But though he managed to secure a competence, with more labour than many stupider professional brethren expended

upon work that made them rich, he would never have possessed the handsome old house at Naybury, and the means of keeping it, but for his wife. Mary Herbert had loved him when he was in his earlier professional struggles, and though she always denied the fact, with her pleasant laugh, it was believed by Mr. Conway's friends that she had proposed to him, or at least had convinced the fidgety and undecided man that they might safely marry, although her dower was little more than expectations. But she assured him that the expectations would all come right, if he would only join her in laughing and waiting. They married, and Mary Conway's quiet confidence in her husband and her good luck soon manifested itself. She made him enter into several competitions, in all of which he assured her that he had not the least chance, and when he had sketched his original plans she refused to allow him to change or modify them, though he almost angrily declared that they could by no possibility succeed. Some of them did succeed, though Mary Conway's sweet temper was sorely tried at the finish of the race. Were an architect allowed twenty years to prepare drawings, he would be in a scramble during the last week, and keep his staff at work all the last three nights. This is a law of architect-nature. But when his condition at that time of trial is improved by doubts and despair, and when he is threatening to put his elevations into the fire and rush out of town, and finally proposes to send them in with the motto *Miserrimus*, those about him may be excused some impatience.

Mrs. Conway had to undergo all this kind of vexation; to keep her husband up to his work, to assure him that he was going to make a great success for her

(this little touch often told when Conway's face was longest), and that she had heard in society the very strongest opinions that if he worked in earnest he could not fail. She never lost patience or temper, she never reproached him with moral cowardice, she never lost her cheerfulness, and when the most trusty clerk was sent off at the last minute with the competition plans — one need not say that it was within an hour of the midnight at which the reception ended — Mrs. Conway's merry orders to him to return to supper and report that the plans had gone in, were (as he used to declare to his own wife on the second floor at Pentonville), a reward for all the trouble and anxiety. A man could never sink very deep in the water with such a lifebelt round his neck.

In one sense, Mrs. Conway did better than this, though nothing could have been better than her companionship, had her husband been a man of more resolve. But as it was, his marriage proved fortunate for him in a way that saved him — and Mary — much exertion in the after days. It has been said that she had expectations. Mr. Conway, when he canvassed them in conjugal debate, always said, in a melancholy manner, that they would come to nothing — not that he loved her the less on that account. Her uncle John would infallibly marry again and have children; and when uncle John was once reported as on a visit to a family with girls, in the Isle of Wight, Mr. Conway was really almost triumphant at the probable accomplishment of his unfavourable anticipations. Mary Conway smiled and waited, and uncle John, six months afterwards, left her ten thousand pounds by will, and added two more by a codicil which he had signed in

the Isle of Wight itself. It may be that this signal success excited Mary Conway to the extent of boxing her melancholy husband's ears and kissing him soundly. Then she went on waiting and smiling, and a cousin of hers, who had influence with a railway company, induced that association to pay about nine times the value of a couple of little fields which Mrs. Conway had inherited from her father. How it was managed is not material to this history, but it is just to state, first, that it was many years ago, when railway people did not act with the scrupulous honesty which now marks all their proceedings; and secondly, that the persons concerned made atonement next month by fighting the just claim of a poor cow-keeper, and cutting his compensation down to such a figure that he dismissed himself from a world in which he saw nothing but ruin. Between the legacy and the purchase money, the Conways were comparatively rich, when the moral of the ten talents came very acceptably to their minds. As they possessed a very good house in London, and money to maintain it, they obtained the house at Naybury and a great deal more money, by a providential discovery on the part of an eminent conveyancer, employed by the executors of Mr. Herbert, that a title which another eminent conveyancer had pronounced to be perfect was faulty by reason of something which the former called Discontinuance, but whatever it was, it took Marley House, and its broad acres appurtenant, from an old sea-officer who had nothing else in the world except half-pay, and gave them to Mr. and Mrs. Conway, who had already twenty thousand pounds and more. They were very kind to the old sea-officer, however, and would never let him be

moved out of his house until he had revenged himself on fate, with rum, and died in his vengeance. And even smiling Mrs. Conway did not smile when she heard that they might take possession, nor for some time after they had been master and mistress of Marley House. So it will be allowed that she made Mr. Conway an admirable wife, and whether you believe or disbelieve that she had invited him to marry her, it is clear that no better arrangement for his happiness could have been possible. And he owned this to her, and to others, and even to himself, and we often tell others sundry truths which we only half accept in our own minds.

That he was her intellectual superior he never doubted, nor did she. He had been highly educated — had he been of coarser mind he might have done better, when a struggling man — and he had read much, and had travelled. But his nature had always prevented his fully availing himself of his advantages. Mrs. Conway, on the other hand, had been carelessly instructed, and finding that by cheerfulness and good-nature she made her way in the world and was liked and loved, she never felt the ambition to cultivate herself for admiration. She had for some years been the affectionate companion of an invalid father, but his society had not tended to develop her faculties, inasmuch as though few men had handled more books, no man had read fewer than that old bookbinder, Maurice Herbert. His bindings are fought for at the auction to this day, often by men who look as little between them as he did. When old Mr. Herbert died, Mary, who would never have left him in his lifetime, took a very early opportunity of setting Mr. Conway's friends the

problem which has been already set forth. She married William Conway, and justly considered that having obtained a husband, it was no business of hers to cultivate anything except his happiness, and she farmed that glebe right well. A very womanly woman, with a kindly directness of purpose, but not more worldly wisdom than served her to support her husband through a kind of trials against which man should not need support. Perhaps, from circumstances, she had learned to think too highly of the sort of self-assertion which she saw in other men than her husband, but she loved him none the less that it was hers to supply an element lacking in him.

The discussion on Magdalen's marriage was interrupted by the re-appearance of Magdalen herself upon the little lawn.

CHAPTER V.

"They do Say"—

"THAT gathering of yours went off better than might have been expected, Charley," said Mr. Wigram, a few nights after the banquet.

They had dropped into a couple of easy chairs in the smoking-room, and were the first members who had ascended thither, after dinner.

"Yes, well enough. Phelps did his work like a man. As Mangles says, this would be the pleasantest club in London, if it were not for the members."

"He is fastidious, since his election at the Emphyrean. By what fluke was that managed, I wonder?" said Mr. Wigram.

"I don't know. Perhaps he was mistaken for

somebody else, and his backers had the sense to humour the blunder. Did you notice, by the way, that he was trying to edit us, as it were, the other night—cutting across things when he thought anybody was going ahead?”

“Most of you were a little on, eh?”

“All of us, and I don’t know how it was. I fancy that Mangles did not wish the clerical man to be utterly astounded.”

“Then he should not have brought him here. A good clergyman doesn’t want us, and we don’t want a bad one,” said Mr. Wigram, sententiously.

“Nice state of things, when a gentleman who happens to be in orders can’t dine with a dozen of other gentlemen without hearing what he ought not to hear,” replied Launceston. “Do you know that I rather liked the way the young fellow came out about Renan? I like to see a man in earnest—push the matches this way.”

Mr. Mangles entered.

“Going to ask us whether we are disengaged, as you want to give another dinner, Samuel?” said Mr. Wigram.

“*Pas si bête*,” was the editor’s gracious reply, as he fed and lit a little meerschaum.

“What did you do with the Reverend Grafton?”

“Mr. Grafton accompanied me to my apartments, accepted my humble hospitality for the night, and departed for his provincial residence on the following morning,” replied Mr. Mangles, with affectation of a didactic manner.

“I should like to know what he said about the club,” remarked Launceston.

"He said it was very conveniently situated, and that the architecture, though unpretending, was effective."

"Don't be a humbug — was he scared?"

"He did not say so. He may have been scandalised, but he did not say that either," replied Mr. Mangles. "One reason may have been that he was indisposed to be critical, at night, and that he went away before I was up in the morning. Ring, Wigram. Some iced water, and the last edition of the *Sun*," he added, to the waiter.

"There's no news," said Launceston. "I wish you wouldn't bring the newspapers up here."

"My dear Charles," replied Mr. Mangles, quietly, "I have the greatest regard for you as an institution, but I have no confidence in your ability to say whether there is or is not any news. You probably mean that there is no telegram stating whether Preposterous or Hippopotamus has won the Wilters' Cup at Muckton races. I am not interested in that national event. I want to see what they have been doing in the House at the morning sitting."

"I wish the House was — well, I wish it was up," said Wigram.

"Are you serious?" said Mr. Mangles, earnestly. "What on earth can the House be to you? I hardly supposed that you knew of its existence. What do you think it is?"

"It is keeping me from leaving England, that's all. The governor has some notion that he ought not to stir until the prorogation. You see," he added, filially, "it is his first session, and he may be excused for thinking Parliament awfully important."

"And then these swells wonder that the mis-governed talk of a revolution," said the editor.

"Swells yourself!" retorted Henry Wigram, actually rising from his chair, and becoming oratorical on the rug. "I think that a revolution would be a very good thing. I am not in the least afraid of one. I wish we had a jolly strong Committee of Public Safety."

"Catiline in shiny boots."

"Very well, and he begs leave to abuse your patience for a minute. I tell you that I should like to see it. Do you believe that a strong government of practical men would allow the present state of things to go on? Do you think that I should have had to sit in a Hansom for twenty minutes in a block at Temple Bar this morning, with monster vans gathering thick and close around me, everybody hindering everybody else, and all the traffic brought to a halt at a time when minutes are made of gold?"

"Wigram in earnest!" said Launceston. "The world is at an end."

"Wigram is in earnest," continued that elegant young gentleman, who had quite forgotten to be pensive. "I believe that such a committee would take London in hand, kick all the boards, and vestries, and beadles, into infinite space, and do no end of good. I would get up a revolution myself, if I could."

"I should like to hear your father on the subject," said Mr. Mangles.

"Yes, a revolution would be hard on the dear old governor," said Henry, "because he is a landowner, and so I hope it will not come in his time. But what should I care? The new fellows would upset the

Church, and I have two brothers in it. Very good. One of them is adored in his parish, because he can lick any fellow in it, and sits up all night with sick babies, and so is the other, because he is their guide and philosopher, adjusts all their disputes, and has driven an attorney to suicide. Both would have a much larger income than they get now. I've no relations in the Army and Navy, but lots of friends, and a revolution would precious soon find plenty of work for them all, for we should be at war with half a dozen despots in six months. As for the Law, the more bulls that run into that old china shop the better, and you know it, Sam Mangles, being a barrister by pretension. We would have a Code Mill."

"I wish you would remember that I am on the committee here, Henry," said Launceston. "I should vote, with regret, for your expulsion, but I should wipe my eyes and do my duty."

"Then," said the reckless Henry, "there's the National Debt. I have no money in the funds, and nobody can get at my income. I should be *impavidus* even if a revolutionary committee sat to consider the Debt, and how much of it was incurred in necessary war, and how much to please robbers and jobbers like that chap up there."

That chap up there was John, Duke of Marlborough — a very fine portrait.

It is due to Mr. Wigram's friends to say that these atrocious sentiments were deemed unworthy of argument, and that Mr. Mangles requested the orator to sit down, and desist from nonsense.

"Nonsense, if you like," said Henry Wigram, again

subsiding into his seat, "but you will hear more, of the same kind."

"What an extraordinary weak mind you must have, dearest Henry," said Charles Launceston. "All this came into your little soul this morning, because you lost a few minutes that were not of the least use to yourself or anybody else. Instead of plotting revolution, you should have recited little hymns to yourself. I am sure that you must have been taught many when you were a child."

"I hate a block," said Mr. Mangles, "though it does not prompt me to revolution. The enraging thing is that the grievance must be removed before you can get to the place where it was created, so you have nobody to revile. Has either of you seen Ernest Dormer since the dinner?"

"I have not," said Launceston, "and if he is wise, he is gone off to look after his own interests at Naybury."

"What makes you say that?" said Mr. Mangles, rather sharply.

"Because I think that your friend the parson will do him no particular good there."

"If you call him my friend, you might remember that my friends do not do unhandsome things, Launceston."

"Don't be tart, my dear Mangles. I am not in the habit of speaking carelessly about anybody I care for."

"I was not asking you to care for Mr. Grafton, but merely reminding you that I brought him to the dinner."

"Yes," said Charley Launceston, who was good

temper itself, "and he sat by you during the greater part of the time, and you can answer for his having been all that could be wished — and a little more," he added, for nothing could make him serious. "But you were not near him during the last hour, for some of us changed seats and he came between Milwarden and me."

"I saw that," said Mangles, "and I thought I observed that he scarcely spoke during that time."

"Not to us."

"To whom?"

"To the Reverend Edward Grafton, unless he had spiritual manifestations, and was conversing with some supernatural party. Don't look savage — you may be quite sure that we made no fun of him, and that neither from Milwarden nor me is anybody, except yourself, likely to hear a word on the subject. You, as his friend, are perhaps entitled to know that another person who was at the table is certainly not regarded by him as a friend."

"I don't want to hear anything about this," said Mr. Wigram, plaintively, "and it is too bad to make me get up and go to the other end of the room."

"Do nothing of the kind, Wigram," said Mr. Mangles. "I don't quite understand Launceston's reason for telling me this."

"Don't you?" said Launceston. "Then I will make you understand in a very few words. I like Ernest Dormer excessively, and I fancied that you, Mangles, cared a deal about him."

"So I do."

"Then you may as well know that another person of your acquaintance not only does not care about him,

but sat grinding his teeth and rolling his eyes, and saying — of course he did not know what he was saying — that he had Dormer on the hip, and would put a lion in his path, and generally signifying that if he had an enemy in the world it was the man on whom you had been expending your best eloquence, and deuced well you did it, too."

"A confounded fool," said Mr. Mangles. He seldom used italics in print, but he spoke them often, and these words were strongly underscored.

"That, at least," said Launceston.

"No, no," said Samuel Mangles, at once discarding a certain cold manner, and going up to the other with the sole purpose of speaking earnestly. "I assure you that he is nothing more. I have every reason to believe Grafton a gentleman. I say this to you two fellows in all sincerity. I have known a good deal of him. He does not live in the world, and he had taken far too much wine; but I assure you that he is not a bad fellow."

"My dear Sam," said Charley Launceston, "a tenth part of such an assurance from you would be enough; but you need not be angry with me for telling you an incident of the table."

"Angry, my dear fellow, not a bit. But your story set me thinking."

"Yes," said Henry Wigram, in his pensive voice. It was not much to say, but both the men knew him, and heard something more than a mere assent.

"Expound that word, Wigs," said Charley.

"I should hold my tongue, perhaps," replied Mr. Wigram, "as Mangles may think that I, too, am trespassing on his preserves."

"Stuff," said Mr. Mangles, re-kindling the meerschäum which he had allowed to go out. "You are one of the best of good fellows, Wigram, and you know that I think so."

"Good," said Henry Wigram, "and I am going to say very little indeed, the less that we shall have an irruption of the unrighteous directly. I, like Charley, am awfully fond of Ernest Dormer, and imagine that if this ferocious young clergyman should do what he menaces, it might not be a case that would justify Ernest in jumping over a bridge."

"If he should break off the marriage with Miss Conway, do you mean?" said Launceston.

"Yes, I mean that, and I see by Sam Mangles' eye that he knows, or thinks he knows what I mean."

"I am not sure that I do," said Mr. Mangles, in a voice of discomposure.

"Now you have spoken, I am quite sure you do," said Henry Wigram, quietly.

Launceston looked at each of them in turn, wonderingly at first, and then — Charley was a gentleman in every sense of the word, but (such is the training of life) no old maid could have got more directly on the scent of scandal.

"A very charming girl — most respectable parents — plenty of money to come," he said, slowly, eyeing his friends as a spirit-rapper eyes his dupes to catch the least gesture.

"All that," said Henry Wigram.

"What more does a man want," asked Launceston, as a matter of form.

"Some men want more, but some men are exacting," said Wigram.

Mr. Mangles, who was standing, laid his hand on the arm of Launceston, and made him approach Wigram. Then leaning between them, he said to the latter,

"You perhaps know more than I do. Now I will not ask you how this is. But I declare to you solemnly, that I have, at present, no knowledge that would justify me in telling Dormer to hesitate."

"And you know Dormer better than I do," said Wigram.

"I don't quite understand."

"It is an awkward thing to say, because I gather that he is your intimate friend. I only say that I like him exceedingly, so far as I know him."

"Speak out, Henry," said Charley Launceston.

"It's understood that you speak in the interest of a man we all like, and Sam Mangles waives all points of feeling?"

"Go on," said Mr. Mangles.

"In saying that you know Ernest Dormer better than I do," said Henry Wigram, "I meant that — that you might be a more adequate judge of — well, damn it, there — that you might know whether it suited him to be fastidious. I know nothing of him but that he is a very pleasant fellow, who was said to have been involved."

"Put the case, Wigram," said Launceston, "that you are Ernest Dormer. What would you wish a real friend to do at this instant?"

Four or five noisily-talking men came into the room, and Mangles launched a wish among them, which it may be hoped was divided among too many to do any harm to any.

Wigram's reply was whispered.

CHAPTER VI.

Magdalen.

THE parrot received a gentle pat on his grey head, and was transferred from his cage to his stand, the Persian cat was conscious of the mildest and most Camilla-like touch from a little foot on his large and outspread tail, and the dispenser of those kindly recognitions glided to her garden chair on the lawn before the breakfast-room window. Parents usually contrive to be proud of any sort of child belonging to them, and it is not for us to find fault with the arrangements of nature, however little we may be able to justify them by the rules of ordinary reason, but no excuse could be needed by William and Mary Conway for their adoration of their daughter Magdalen.

With fear and trembling, in a day when ugly heroines are the fashion, we are compelled to own that Magdalen Conway was beautiful. It is not our fault. It could be wished that she had come under that window and looked up with eyes capable of shining with lurid light, and that in the mean time her unhealthily white skin, yellow hair, and over-red lips should remind the beholder of a lady-like Ghoul who mixed among the very best dead. Or, failing these attractions, it would have been satisfactory to be able to say that Miss Conway had not a single really good feature, that her hair was a bad colour, and that her form, though it might develop into comeliness, was incomplete and even awkward. We venerate the genius that purposely selects an unfavourable type of woman, and works it up into an ideal of the terrible or of the loveable. But

having no especial fondness for trouble, for trouble's sake, and disclaiming the power that succeeds best with objectionable material, we are content to accept a gracious instead of an ungracious type of young ladyhood, and with every apology for striking into a new path, we introduce a beautiful girl as one in whom it may be possible to take an interest. We admit that the type is commonplace, for English girls have a habit of being handsome, and possibly therefore the skill of an artist may be more severely taxed, in dealing with a specimen of what may be seen in full beauty in every drawing-room, than it might have been in presenting an image which should at once strike by its infrequency. But the die is cast, and like Paris we reject the haughty fiend Juno, and the ugly incarnation of wisdom, Minerva, and kneel at the feet of Venus and loveliness, a classical illustration about as much out of fashion as the kind of heroine whom we have chosen.

Let us look at Magdalen, at least until she shall have deserved other regards, with a gaze of kindness like that which fell upon her from the window where stood those who had no such treasure on earth. What they saw was a girl of about twenty years of age — it would be prettier to say a girl who had seen twenty summers, but Magdalen had seen twenty winters too, or she would not have had that healthy tint which is due to the bracing atmosphere of the rougher months. Fair, save in the poet's sense, you would scarcely call her, for her complexion was of that hue which sometimes warms into a richness foreign to conventional fairness. Yet Magdalen was not entitled to the proud honours of the brunette. Hers were the English cheek and brow, and hers was the wealth of chestnut hair,

just now in full luxuriance, and easily turned to any fashion into which the soft white pliant hands chose to mould it. What we call the Saxon character was most distinctively that of Magdalen's beauty, and the light morning dress she wore did not conceal the well-developed form, or altogether deny proof that the arms were rounded and white. It is well, not less for the future than for the present, that a figure like this should have the advantage of height, and Magdalen Conway was somewhat tall, though the exquisite proportion of her form did not at first impress you with the fact. The charm of the features would have been powerful, even had they lacked much of the expression which they possessed, but Magdalen had two very strong points of expression, and the possession of either, by a girl, justifies a hesitating admirer in an instant offer. One was a smile which lighted up over the entire face in a moment, and disappeared with the occasion, not lingering like a clown's grin that does not exactly know how to take itself out of the way any more than the clown knows how to take himself out of a room. The other was an even more charming little frown which had nothing to do with temper, but rather expressed surprise and puzzled one for a second, until, like a discord in music it should be delightfully resolved, and make way for the smile that was waiting at the lips. Look for either of these signs, my single young brother, and if you find either — and still more, if you find both — drop on your manly knees and mention your income and adoration.

Such was Magdalen Conway to outward view. And we have written in vain if that beautiful English-look-

ing girl have not, at first sight, established herself well in the heart of the reader. Whether she confirm her hold on that fortress, or whether she be dislodged with ignominy, it shall not be said that the stronghold surrendered to an unworthy custodian.

"Put up the sunshade, there's a dear child," was the first exhortation from the window, and we know who issued that warning.

"Very well, mamma. But I thought you heard somebody say that a slight touch of sunburn was often very pretty," said Magdalen, laughing.

"Somebody talks nonsense, dear."

"But you mustn't say so, mamma, and I must not listen to such disrespectful remarks." And the sunshade was playfully held before the face, as if to shut out evil counsel. It rose again the next minute, and Magdalen said,

"Are we very early this morning? I went in to see after my letter, but that tiresome old postman has not been round."

"Quite impossible, of course, that he should have no letter," said Mr. Conway.

"Quite, papa," said Magdalen, with some real and some pretended solemnity. "But if such a dreadful thing should occur, I hope that you are ready to start off for London by the next train, and ascertain what has happened. Please tell me what o'clock it is."

"Where is your own watch, Miss?"

"That is gone to London, papa, and it is in very safe hands, and you are not to ask any more questions about it."

"I don't think that you would change that gift for

any other," said Mr. Conway, as usual ready with an idea that annoyed him.

"Why, you know I would not, papa. Not for Charles the First's watch that he gave away on the scaffold, if they offered it me. I don't think I can say more than that, can I? But you deserve to be punished for daring to think of such a thing, and you shall be, too."

And Maggie darted at the window, seized her offending parent by the dressing-gown, and dragging him forward, kissed him on both cheeks.

"Let me ever hear you say anything of that kind again," she said, menacingly, as, slightly flushed with the little performance, she stood for a moment, holding up her finger, before returning to her seat.

"O, where is that letter?" she added; "I am sure that there is something going on in London. Papa, has the Queen appointed a new Postmaster-General who doesn't know how to sort the letters properly. The old one ought to show him how?"

"I have not read anything of the kind, my dear," said her father; "but of course, as I said, anything is more probable than that Mr. Dormer should miss a post?"

"Anything. He never misses posts. And he has not missed this post," cried the girl, starting up. "There is dear old Edwards trying to ring — once, twice — he will succeed this time — there. No, I will not run to meet it, sir — I see what you mean. I will have my letters brought to me, like a young lady."

Perhaps, however, she would not have waited very long for this one. But a pretty parlour-maid,

preternaturally alert, of course, in such business, was the next minute on the lawn, bringing Magdalen a letter. It was a good little bit of comedy to see Miss Conway sit gracefully down in her chair and affect to take the letter deliberately, under six eyes whose owners all knew exactly how glad she was to receive it.

Ernest Dormer had made them laugh one evening at a description of the stage conventionality in regard to a letter. The late Mr. Warde's reception of the warning epistle addressed to King Gustavus the Third at the Masked Ball, was the masterpiece in that way, and of Ernest's imitation of this celebrated absurdity, Magdalen, raising her eyelids and half turning her pretty head, and gently striking the letter, held at arm's length, with the back of her right hand, gave her saucy little reminiscence.

"A letter for Me. From whom can it Be?"

But she could not complete the theatrical picture by utterly discharging all meaning from the smile with which, in further copy of the original, she proceeded ostentatiously to break up the letter.

Her parents applauded, and discreetly withdrew to leave her to enjoy her lover's despatch.

How many a letter has, during the period of life when we care about the way in which people write to us, changed our mental atmosphere, without our being able to say why! We have expected words of kindness and love, and we have received them; and yet we have not had what we wanted.

Magdalen Conway read her letter, and of course read it again, and on the second reading fancied that she liked it less than on the first. Yet she vainly

tried to fix upon any passages which could justly disappoint her; and this was the more disturbing, because when we can once lay hold of a fault in one whom we love, we can easily argue ourselves into the belief that it is a merit. But an intangible grievance is very grievous. The letter was really affectionate, and not without a warmer attribute. It would have been difficult for a man of refinement to write better or more fittingly to a refined girl. Of course it lacked the idiotic iterations with which a stupid person seeks to impart conviction of a clumsy fondness, but there was no absence of the passionate assurances dear alike to all women. And when the lover rose from his knees and spoke of the outside world, he had delightful things to say, and he said them wittily and well. He ended with what was apparently a natural and ardent expression of tenderness, and it would have been very hard for any man, except a poet in love, and in a good temper, to have mended the letter in Magdalen's hand.

Yet, when she had read it for the third time, she did not smile nor did her eyes moisten with a gentler pleasure. She left the lawn, bestowing no more attention on her favourites, and went to her room. Soon afterwards she left the house, to attend to a duty which she seldom neglected. She went to visit the sick and the poor in Naybury.

Magdalen had acquired this habit in different scenes and under different influences from those which now surrounded her. For reasons which may hereafter occur to the reader, Miss Conway's visitations of her humbler fellow-creatures were conducted upon a different principle from that which seems to actuate a

large number of ladies who bounce into the dwellings of the poor, and appear to be less like angels of mercy than members of a jury for examining moral and religious weights and measures, and fining and rebuking delinquents. Nor, again, did she regard the poor as a country gentleman very properly regards his pheasants — as articles which induce resort to a wholesome occupation, and of which the preserves ought therefore to be duly attended to, while the birds must not be made too tame and familiar. Magdalen had some odd ideas upon the subject of poverty, and if she had argued them out, even with a less stern person than a mere political economist, she would have found much difficulty in supporting them; but then the subject was one on which she always refused to argue. Unless one had the key to her views, they were very inconsistent. For, while she saw in poverty a thing to reverence, and by no means to patronise, far less to treat as a nuisance, Miss Conway was always rejoiced when any of those whom she befriended could emerge from indigence, and, either by self-help or the help of others, could assume independence. The first of these views is not unknown to thousands of kindly-natured women, who, however, cannot combine it with the second, and have a definite conviction that a certain class was ordained to be “always with us,” and therefore is an institution of a sacred character, and not to be uprooted by private or public endeavour. How Magdalen managed to reconcile her notions, or whether she ever sought to reconcile them by any mental process, may be known when we know her better. It is more to the purpose to say that she always did her work alone — asked no aid out of her own household, and steadily

declined to become a member of either the Naybury Dorcas Society or the Talithacumi Young Ladies' District Visiting Association.

To-day, Magdalen set out to visit three or four poor persons who lived on the frontier of the parish, which was extensive. Their cottages were indeed separated by two fields from the end of a straggling suburb of Naybury. More prosaic homes it would be impossible to describe than the row of little houses known as Trafalgar. They had been so called from a tradition, probably unfounded, that the timbers of which they were built had once been those of one of the ships that fought under Nelson. The cabins were "not" convenient (to quote Bobadil), but they were not worse than thousands of houses which are erected by greedy men, with a conscientious simplicity of meaning in the matter of architecture, the meaning being to spend as little as possible in the building, and to screw as much as possible out of the tenant. The rule is applied in the case of edifices of a higher order, but it is no where so honestly carried out as in the dwellings of the English poor. Builders of rows of bad and showy villas for persons of moderate means who wish to seem richer than they are, may do much in the way of flimsy and vamped work, and may greatly neglect sanitary arrangements, but are compelled to make some sacrifices to appearances, to affix some vulgar ornamentation, to parody with some pretence of imitation the comforts of a real house. But in the homes of the poor there is no such sham. The dirty little builder who has scraped and jobbed until he has acquired the means to erect his hovels, selects the worst materials and puts them together in the worst

way, and the helplessness of those who have no capital at all is never so signally manifested as against the tyranny of those who have only a little. Shame and character being out of the question, the landlord-and-tenant question here is happily adjusted without the aid of other law than that which puts in a distress. Meantime, the builder hoards and scrapes, and dies comparatively rich and worth going into mourning for, unless the Nemesis has come upon him in the way of a larger speculation, under the advice of an attorney who is the minister of the displeasure of the gods. Meantime, too, two or three generations of the helpless poor have become lean and rheumatic paupers under his rotten roofs and over his stagnant drains.

With reluctance one introduces such features into a picture, and the only excuse is that they are in the original scene. It was to a set of houses of the architectural order of Squalor that Miss Conway went out on the day she had received Ernest Dormer's letter. She made no sign of being on an errand of charity — no footman marched behind her, privately cursing at being obliged to carry a basket at all, and a basket for such creatures as those, and a basket containing articles of which the kitchen had been, as he might say, robbed. Nor did Miss Conway, with a profounder pride of humility, herself bear any food or medicine to her poor friends at Trafalgar. It would doubtless have looked well to have done so, and many persons who inhabited the houses in her road would have seen her good works, and perhaps have admired her. It was not her way. Of one of whom it is wished that the reader should think well, the writer must record with regret that she had formed an idea that the poor

generally know what they want better than any one out of their sphere can know for them, and that they prefer to spend your charity money for themselves. Magdalen carried her heterodoxy to the extent of giving coin instead of broken meat, and she persevered in this course in spite of awful warnings and illustrations. It had been proved, nay, the shameless old woman had daringly owned, that Mary Jull had bought tobacco for herself and her crippled husband with some of Miss Conway's money, and that the evil old creatures smoked it in concert, until, as Mrs. Bulliman (an inveterate and admirable visitor of the poor) remarked, the place smelt like a tap-room, and she herself was accused by her impertinent school-boy son of having adopted a short pipe in private. That Dick Rusper, being unable to walk, in consequence of the fall from the haystack, had sent his boy to the Red Star for brandy, which he could have paid for only from means furnished by Miss Conway. But, worst of all, when the travelling circus visited Naybury, Peter Widgeon had taken his wife and all their little Widgeons to see the horses, though it was notorious that Peter had been out of work for a long time, and owed money at the baker's. This profligate Peter, who had dared to lay out money on pleasure while a debt remained unpaid, had been relieved out of the purse of Magdalen Conway. As Sir Richard Salvington had well observed at a magistrates' meeting, those who fostered the follies of the poor were responsible for their crimes; and it is probable that he would often have attended again, and made many other admirable observations, but that failing, after a desperate struggle, to bribe himself into the House, he had been compelled to hide himself in an

upper chamber, like the earlier Christians, for fear of the Jews. All these things, and many more, were known to Miss Conway, yet on the present occasion she had provided herself with silver.

Irregularities might have been pardoned to her by the refined reader, if Magdalen had selected interesting pets. There is something very graceful in certain groups with which Art has made us acquainted, and with which we should much like to know how Art originally made itself acquainted. Nothing can be more touching, and at the same time more elegant, than a picture of a daintily-dressed lady stepping prettily over the clean white threshold of the well-kept cottage, and tendering a hymn-book to the neat and curtsying mother, while handsome though plebeian children, with their hair agreeably combed, look so gratefully at the lady as to have no eyes for the benevolent footman who comes behind with loaves and fruit. Perhaps there were no such cottages in Naybury, or perhaps Miss Conway did not distribute hymn-books. It was not to the poor, of whom the well-to-do tradesmen said that they were very worthy persons, and charity was not thrown away upon them, — it was not to the poor of whom Mrs. Bulliman and her Dorcasians said that they knew their places, and respected their betters, that Miss Magdalen usually went. She not only left this class of persons to the care of others, but it is sad to add that she rather eschewed all the interesting creatures for whom the religious part of Naybury exerted itself. Especially was Magdalen Conway's irregular mind exhibited when she had yielded to her mother's request to go, one evening, to good Mrs. Bulliman's, to hear the conversation of Mr.

Jacob Jackano, a converted Hebrew, who, Mrs. Bulliman said, had some sweet experiences which she had been privileged to hear. Miss Conway went with her mamma, but was so far from being edified by the utterances of the interesting convert, that she was unkind enough to say (after being severely pressed and cross-examined by her hostess), that she did not believe him sincere. For a long time this cruel judgment was held in memory by the Bulliman circles, and Magdalen caused much head-shaking during the Dorcas meetings. But the subject dropped after a London newspaper had been read in Naybury. That journal revealed, without the delicacy which in France gives even a criminal the screen of initials, that Mr. Jackano had been applying the process of conversion to certain valuable securities which, in the simplicity of his new faith, he had probably supposed were common to all Christian men, and that for his ignorance of the thirty-eighth article of the Church he had gone into bondage. But when she met the Bullimans, Magdalen never mentioned the trial, though she had read it aloud to her father. What can be said of a nature which had so little impulse of self-vindication?

Those whom she had to-day to visit were certainly not of the washed-and-grateful order of poor. Her first call was upon Mary Jull, the wife of the cripple, and the smoker of tobacco.

"I knock at their doors, always," Mrs. Bulliman had said.

"Certainly, we owe them that respect," Magdalen had replied.

"O, my dear, not on that account, certainly. We should do very wrong to try to impart to them the

habits of a different class of society. I knock, and I advise you to do the same, for a very different reason. And I always call out my name, before I enter."

"Might I ask why?" said Miss Conway, smiling.

"Because, my dear, who knows what they may be doing? I called on young Tom Rix soon after he had married Ellen Davis, and not only was he smoking his pipe, but his wife was sitting on his knee! I do not think that Ellen Rix was likely to do that again, after the lecture I gave her, but it was a warning to me, and I have never since gone into a house without knocking."

"But is there anything wrong in a wife's sitting on her husband's knee when he smokes?" asked Magdalen, quietly. "If she does not mind the smell of the tobacco, I do not see why she should not. You have a very fine picture in your dining-room, by one of the great masters, and it represents exactly such a scene, wife, smoke, and all, and Mr. Bulliman kindly pointed out its merits to me."

"My dear Miss Conway," was the reply, and it must have implied all the necessary arguments, as Mrs. Bulliman, who was a very clever woman, made no further answer.

However, for her own reasons, and not the matron's, Magdalen knocked at the door of the Julls.

"Come in, Miss," was the croaked response.

"Then you knew who it was, Mrs. Jull," said Miss Conway, smiling, as she entered the squalid den.

She called the old creature Mrs. Jull, by the way. Mrs. Bulliman never gave titles, at least to her inferiors, and had a text about it, which somehow was

clearly explained as not to the purpose, when Lord Yarrington and the Master of Glenlivet visited them during their Highland sojourn. Mrs. Bulliman always addressed her poor by their baptismal names. It was usually either forgiven or tolerated; but she had been frightfully scandalised once, when a washerwoman, in an advanced stage of intoxication, had replied to the lady's

"How are you, Sarah?"

"Well, and if you come to that, how are you, Maria?"

The wretched woman had, with the treachery of her order, availed herself of the knowledge acquired through her professional acquaintance with Mrs. Bulliman's linen. But this painful incident did not teach the lady to give the poor matrons upon whom she bestowed her tautological polysyllabic tracts the title of which the working-man's wife is particularly proud.

"I knowd your step, Miss, let alone your knock, and they are both very welcome to a poor old woman."

Now, she was a canting poor old woman, and her speech implied a lie, for her husband, the cripple, had seen Miss Conway coming, and had requested his wife (enforcing his request with a reference to her spiritual future), to put out her pipe, which Mrs. Jull had not done.

"And the rheumatism, I hope that is better, Mrs. Jull?"

"No, Miss, and never will be; but I hope to bear all things patient as are sent for our good, though we don't see it with our carnal eyes."

"We are not to bear anything that we can cure,

Mrs. Jull, or why have we got the sense to know how to cure it? Has the doctor seen you lately?"

"Yes, Miss, he have seen me, but you know what doctors are."

"I do know, Mrs. Jull," said Magdalen, gently. "I know that they are the kindest and the most patient men in the world, and the only people who are always trying to do good."

"I say nothing against them, Miss. I suppose they are like other people, and know what's good for themselves. When you are ill, Miss, which I hope and pray it may be few and far between, I dare say the doctor's patient enough, and hears all you have to say, and proud and happy he ought to be to do so, which is only his duty, being well paid for it. But it is another thing when they're paid by the lump."

"You must not say that about Mr. Beccles, because you do him wrong, though you don't mean it, I am sure. His rich patients complain that he runs away from them to look after the Union."

"Yes, Miss, do they? And so they grudge us the only comfort we get, which is the doctor's visit? Well, well!"

At this moment a significant growl from Mrs. Jull's crippled husband warned her that if she did not assume a more befitting manner, and avoid offending the young lady, he might have something to say thereafter.

"I really did not know you were there, Jull," said Magdalen. "The sun is so bright outside that I went right up to your wife without seeing you."

"All right, Miss," said Jull, who was not a bad fellow, deducting his habit of correcting his wife too

emphatically. "It's kind of you to come and see us, and we take it kind, though the old woman grumbles like —"

Mr. Jull was about, possibly, to use a simile which his judgment told him might be out of taste, and he mended his manners by spoiling his sentence.

"Like she oughtn't. She's no worse nor no better than ordinary. If you'd look, Miss, at that wall there, at the back, you'd see that it wasn't likely. No, not there, Miss, the air and sun comes in at the door a bit, and dries us like, but over there."

Yes, Magdalen looked at the wall, and perceived that the ordinary grime of the cottage of this kind actually glistened, and that near the roof, and out of the blackness, drops of wet sparkled. Some former tenant had sought to improve things by pasting up paper, but it had all gone, of course, except a few scraps on which colour, nearly washed out, showed feebly.

"I did think I see a slug a while ago," said Mr. Jull, cheerily, and as a gamekeeper might have told his pretty mistress that he thought he had seen a hare on the lawn. "But I wasn't sure, and so I held my tongue, as it would only have been another grievance for the old woman."

"It ought to be put in order," said Miss Conway.

"I will ask my father to speak to your landlord."

"Please don't do that, Miss," said Jull, earnestly.

"Why not? Surely he ought not to let you live in a place which is positively dangerous."

"You don't know the ins and the outs, Miss," said Mr. Jull, "and it's no good that you should trouble yourself about it."

"It is no trouble, and if it were, it would be a duty."

"You mean it kind, Miss, but please don't do it," repeated Jull. "Us'll get on well enough. We are used to it. And I've nothing to say against slugs, if it was a slug. They don't bite, and in some countries I have heard are thought not that bad for eating, though I can't go so far as that."

"What rubbish are you talking to the lady," said Mrs. Jull, "and her time precious."

"I should be much happier, Mrs. Jull, if I saw the way to getting something done for you here. This is hot weather, and yet there is slimy damp in your cottage. What must it be in the winter?"

"Jull is not too wise, Miss, but he speaks right in this, and please not to say anything. What a lady is pleased to give us out of her great goodness and kindness is heartily welcome, but we don't want nothing said about us."

Mr. Jull's growl indicated his distaste for this last speech.

"Well," said Magdalen, "I should have been glad to do something. But you have a right to say how you will be helped."

She placed some silver in the old woman's hand.

"The Lord reward you, Miss," said Mrs. Jull, "and may you —"

Magdalen's hand stopped the benediction.

"And I have a right," said Miss Conway, smiling, "to say how I will be thanked. Get yourself some new flannel, Mrs. Jull. And if tobacco comforts you, Jull, it seems to me that you ought to have it, for it must be very miserable, to one who was so active as you were, to be confined to his seat."

And she actually showed her unfitness to be a lady

visitor by giving Mr. Jull money avowedly to buy tobacco.

"He'd better let me buy him a good book, Miss, as might make him a better man," said Mrs. Jull.

"At all events, I am sure that you will do what he asks you," said Magdalen, firmly. "And now I must wish you good-bye. Mind what I said about the flannel, Mrs. Jull. Good-bye to you both."

Magdalen went out, and the couple held their tongues for some little time.

"Flannel!" said Mrs. Jull, with a scoff of ample meaning.

"Yes, I know your sort of flannel, and what sort of a measure it's measured with," said her husband. He then proceeded to some unfavourable criticisms upon the way in which she had talked to Miss Conway, but though these were perfectly just in themselves, and, sentimentally, were not in excess of the affectionate counsel which a husband is bound to offer to a wife, when he thinks that she is in error, the language in which they were conveyed was so apart from that of this periphrastic age, and so very direct, to say nothing of garnishings, zoological and theological, that it may suffice to record that Mr. Jull gave his wife what she subsequently termed a most thundering blowing up. Finally, she bought tobacco, and they smoked the pipe of peace, but no Naybury draper could testify to a sale of flannel to the ungrateful old heathen.

Magdalen, whose sense of humour was one of her unwomanly merits, would not have failed, in other circumstances, to appreciate the ludicrous part of the little scene between the Julls. But to-day she was in no mirthful spirit. She was doing what she considered

to be her duty, but she extracted no pleasure from it, save that which arose from the reflection that she had not permitted her own feelings to prevent her from giving what was due to others. It is not necessary to dwell upon this proof that she had very little true sensibility. Otherwise, of course, she would have betaken herself to her chamber and some afflicting novel of passion, and left the poor to take care of themselves until she should be in a frame to lower herself to their small and paltry sorrows. Imagine a real heroine ministering to a pauper's rheumatism, when her own soul was disquieted within her!

The second visit to-day was to a cottage into which it requires moral courage to conduct the virtuous reader. Except that it would, perhaps, be cowardly to leave Magdalen to pay this visit alone, the temptation to slur the detail would be almost irresistible. For there are some things which we have all agreed not to talk about. The system of refusing to take notice of these things cannot be said to have exactly succeeded, as those wretched newspapers, which obstinately refuse to comply with the ignoring convention, prove to us daily, in the coarsest manner. But we can, to a considerable degree, exclude such matters from our observation. The writer of fiction has no right to complain that such is the rule, when, in exchange for the surrender of subjects of every day's presentation, he is generously allowed and encouraged to exert his best skill in the delineation of crimes which are of rare occurrence. While he is permitted to describe good society as embellished by poisoners, forgers, and seventh-commandment breakers, he must be unreasonable indeed if he murmurs that he must say nothing, except

in elegant poetry, about vices of other kinds. Still, if persons like Magdalen Conway will hold that charity never shuts her eyes to misery, how can the historians of those persons escape from the unwelcome task of chronicling inelegant eccentricity? Briefly as it can be told, therefore, it must be told that Magdalen proceeded from the cottage of Mr. and Mrs. Jull to that occupied by a personage to whom the nominal honour of matronhood could not be accorded, and whom, therefore, Miss Conway could not offend in addressing her by her Christian name. Nor did the fact that there was one other occupant of the cottage, who had no Christian name at all, but had not lived long enough to know his need of one, prevent Miss Conway from making kindly and pitying inquiries here, or from offering, in addition to money, some advice, which was not ungraciously received by a sadly wicked person. Miss Conway did not advise this person to take herself, and the unfortunate little blue-eyed creature to whom she clung so unjustifiably, into the home provided for such people by the involuntary charity of the district, but made some other suggestions, which were not without fruit in after days. There was no loud gratitude expressed here, for it is difficult for a woman to offer loud thanks when she is sobbing over a sick baby, but Magdalen did not feel that she had been unthankfully treated, or that she had been contaminated by a blessing from an unblest woman.

The third and last visit which Miss Conway had intended to make would have been as duly paid as the others, but for an interruption which was unexpected and unwelcome. As she knocked at a cottage door about fifty yards further on, Edward Grafton opened it from within.

CHAPTER VII.

The Curate of Saxbury.

"Good morning, Miss Conway," said the young clergyman, his colour rising as he raised his hat.

Magdalen's acknowledgment of his salutation was rather formal. At no moment was she particularly desirous to meet Mr. Grafton, and at that moment his appearance was especially unwelcome.

"Good morning," she said, and at once looked round for the inhabitant of the cottage, intending to imply that she desired no conversation with the clergyman.

"You come on your usual errand of benevolence," he said, "but I fear it will be useless. Widow Faunt is a strange person, and to-day she has gone away, it seems, leaving her door unfastened. I could get no notice of my knocking, so I came in, but she is certainly not here. But her ways surprise nobody."

"Have you inquired of any of her neighbours?"

"Yes, but nobody knows anything about her. She is not a popular person among them, as you may perhaps be aware."

Magdalen did not know what to do. If she remained, Mr. Grafton would probably remain with her, and if she went away, he would as probably walk with her, and she desired neither attention. She wished that she had a fourth pensioner in Trafalgar, that she might have disembarrassed herself of her companion by going into another cottage. On the whole she thought that Mr. Grafton might least like to wait, so she said,

"I will stay a little time and see whether she returns."

Miss Conway took a seat just outside the cottage, on a small bench, screened from the view of the neighbours on the left by a hedge which by some marvel had not been cut up for firewood by any needy occupant of the place. On the right, there were no other houses, and the view was over a large piece of the flat Naybury nightmare landscape.

There was no seat for him, unless he had sat down in closer proximity to the young lady than courtesy permitted.

"Pray do not let me detain you," she said, perceiving that he lingered. "Your time is valuable. I wish to see the poor woman, as I may not be able to come again very soon."

"I suppose not," he said, in an odd voice.

As he had little right to suppose anything about her, and less to express his suppositions in that tone, Magdalen made no reply, but took out a small book from her pocket. For the moment, she did not proceed to the broader hint of opening the volume, though she felt much inclined to do so.

"Might I look at your book?" said the Reverend Mr. Grafton.

He had known her a long time, certainly, and a comparative stranger might have made the request in a playful manner. But Mr. Grafton's manner was not playful, and there had been relations between them which had made him neither friend nor stranger, exactly. So Magdalen felt the request to be an impertinence.

"No, I must not show it," she replied, gently. "It has some writing in it not intended for anybody to see but myself."

A well-bred man would not, in the circumstances, have asked to see the book, but, if he had been led into the mistake, would have extricated himself graciously. But Edward Grafton did not just then remember social routine.

"I understand," said the pertinacious young clergyman, significantly. "I make no doubt that the notes, if not valuable, are very interesting to Miss Conway."

"I said nothing about notes," replied Magdalen, forcing her voice to a coldness which suited it very ill. "If he speaks to me again," she said to herself, "I declare I will begin to read."

But he could not, or would not, see that her not beginning was only a proof of her reluctance to seem rude.

"That is not one of your grandfather's famous bindings," said Mr. Grafton. "His good taste would have revolted at those splashes of gold and ill-matched colours."

Perhaps so; but Magdalen was in no humour to accept a compliment to her ancestor at the expense of the person who had given her the little volume. She replaced the book in her pocket, without reply, and looked out into the distance as if to discover the Widow Faunt.

"I would wait," said Mr. Grafton, "if I thought there were any chance of her coming, but she cannot be reckoned upon. Usually one may be sure that this kind of person will be found at home about this hour, for the lower class think that the world is at an end if they are not at their meals at the usual time."

"The poor work hard," replied Miss Conway, "and

I dare say that they are glad to get to their meals. But I have begged you not to wait."

"You prefer that I should not?"

"I am sure that you have claims on your time, Mr. Grafton."

"Or that I ought to have," he replied, almost rudely.

"Again Magdalen opposed to impertinence the safest defence of all. Talk of Medusa's head — what shield chills an excited adversary like what may be called aggressive silence?"

"You might remind me, too," he went on, but in a milder tone, "that I am out of my parish, as it does not come nearer to us than that second fence there, and also that I am trespassing upon ground which is already better occupied."

Magdalen had mastered herself, by this time.

"I do not think that you ever heard me say anything of the kind," she replied. "Indeed I could not, being a sort of trespasser myself, for all these poor people, as you know, are allotted among the regular district visitors."

"Yes," he said, "I am aware that you have no particular respect for regulations, even though they have the sanction of your parochial superiors. I am not one of them, and therefore I have no great right to express any opinion on the subject."

"Exactly so," said Miss Conway, her spirit again rising.

"If I were," said Mr. Grafton, incensed at this answer, "I should not hesitate to prevent a kind of interference which I disapprove."

"Then," said Magdalen, whose sense of humour

came to her aid at the sight of his unwarrantable irritation, "I ought to be very grateful to that poor old fence."

Hereupon the Reverend Edward Grafton grew very red indeed, and was in great danger of forgetting that it was scarcely the thing for a gentleman to come into another parish than his own, and scold a young lady for doing acts of charity. But the fact was that he cared nothing about parochial limits, or charitable visits, or the poor either, in his present state, and all that his language really meant was, that he was exceedingly angry with Magdalen. He was quite clever enough to feel that he had been talking ridiculously, and that Magdalen would probably give her parents a laughable account of his commination. So he pulled himself up at the fence.

"Ah!" he said; "you cannot suppose I meant to say anything that could annoy you. We have, you know, battled that little matter over a good many times, and I have not been fortunate enough to convince you that I am right."

"I do not think that I gave much battle," said Magdalen; "indeed it would have been hopeless, considering that you were supported by all the allied forces of Mrs. Bulliman and the Dorcas Society."

Now, if there was one thing in the world which this young clergyman disliked, it was the recognition of women as managers or even advisers in the business of a parish, and therefore this gentle remark went home, especially as it came from Magdalen Conway. He was accused, by the very woman whom he loved, of having brought against her the very women whom, in their parochial capacity, he hated.

"Your memory does me injustice," he said, struggling with his inclination to say something much stronger. "But I have long since ceased to expect anything like fair play at your hands."

"I do not understand that, Mr. Grafton," said Magdalen, loftily, "but it is not necessary to explain. I will not wait any longer for Mrs. Faunt. Good morning."

"Stay," he said. "At least we are old friends. You have said that you are not likely to come here again, and I conclude that you have resolved upon this marriage?"

This marriage. Was that the way for Edward Grafton to speak to her? But she was not going to lose her temper.

"I am soon to be married, Mr. Grafton," Magdalen said, "and my poor people will have to do without me for some time, though not for very long. I am sure that you and their other kind friends will attend to them far better than I have done."

She made him a slight bow — she would have given him her hand, in spite of his rudeness, if he had sought to take it — and she was about to go, when he came between her and the little gate of the cottage inclosure.

"There are times," he said hurriedly, "when a man owes it to himself to speak out in spite of all the conventions of the world, and as you calmly tell me, Magd — Miss Conway, that you are about to take an irrevocable step, and as I may see you no more until it has been taken, I will say something, at any risk."

"You know best what risk you are afraid of, Mr.

Grafton," said Magdalen, now thoroughly aroused, and haughty.

"I will show you how much afraid I am," he replied, almost insultingly. "I meant only, as you well know, the risk of offending you for ever."

He paused, as an angry man will sometimes do, in the vicious hope of being lashed into increased wrath by the reply which he has provoked. But Magdalen disappointed him. She stood still and awaited his next speech.

"You do not answer, but if you did, it would be to say that you do not care enough for my words to be offended by them. So much the better. I can speak with greater freedom. You are about to marry Mr. Ernest Dormer. Now, if that person —"

"Or that gentleman." She spoke in the calmest voice.

"Suppose I refuse to accept your correction?"

"Then we have exchanged the last words. Allow me to pass."

"I accept it, then, in the world's sense. Of that gentleman I am not desirous to speak at all."

"That is best, perhaps," said Magdalen, gently.

"Best for him, perhaps," answered Mr. Grafton, unable to govern himself. "But I would speak of *you*," he added, with a hasty gesture of deprecation, as she again sought to pass by. "It is not because I have ventured to admire — to love you, and you refused me, that I now peril all your regard by saying what I would say. You were perhaps right. I might not have been worthy of you. I know that I adored you — nay, I have done with the past. But I should be false to my own love, false to my own heart, if I did not now warn

you to be very sure that you have given your affections to safer keeping than mine would have been. I know how I should have treasured your heart, how I should have hung upon your words, your looks, your smiles, and have felt that all the best service of a whole life would be but a poor repayment for your trust, and I have a right to assure myself — no — but I have a right to ask you to assure yourself that you have secured a truer devotion and a richer love."

"I have heard you. May I not go?"

"With no other answer?"

"My answer is in what I have already said."

"Ah! That you marry Ernest Dormer. That you believe he is worthier of you than I am. You make no other answer? Then, as I solemnly believe that it is not so, and that he is utterly unworthy of you — that your union will be one of misery and —"

He felt, as he spoke, that his speech was shameful, and his forced courage fell at her glance, nor could he again summon resolution to stay her as she passed proudly by him and walked, not hastily, away in the direction of her home.

Grafton sat down on the little bench, clenched his hands, and gazed out upon the landscape, seeing nothing.

He did not know, when he found his tongue, how long he had remained in that attitude.

"I am a fool," he said.

"Yes," said a voice in reply. "Though that's the first wise word the young parson has said."

A woman stood at the cottage door.

Mr. Grafton turned eagerly round.

"You here, Widow Faunt?" he said, savagely.

"I am here, parson. Where should a respectable woman be but in her virtuous home?"

It would not, perhaps, have occurred to anybody else to call Mrs. Faunt a respectable woman, though, to outward appearance, she had only just escaped being one. Large, fair, and almost comely, she seemed much superior to the starved and stunted population of Trafalgar, and yet she did not look out of place in that precinct. The plump features were not expressive, but they were not bad, only that Mrs. Faunt, that is her nose, the parting of her hair, and the set of her decent black dress, were all and normally awry. You had an inclination to try to pull her, generally, into straightness. Her dark eyes, though small and deep set, were bright, nor would the smile have been bad, but that it took various wrong directions, as if the machinery for working it did not obey the owner's will. Could any given principle have been applied to the arrangement of the hair, it would have seemed good, and there was plenty of it, dark, and perhaps a little dusty. The hands, which she had joined across her wealthy bosom, were comfortable-looking hands, and not dirty, nor could Widow Faunt be called a slattern, though there was much about her which the orderly world would condemn. If she looked like one who had seen better days, she also looked like one who was quite, or nearly satisfied with the worse ones on which she had fallen.

Mr. Grafton knew her very well. She had occasionally come over to his father's rectory, in the next parish, and assisted in the kitchen, when more than ordinary hospitality was to be dispensed by that proud old clergyman. In rendering help to the rectory cook,

the Widow Faunt had often given hints of a valuable kind; also of a kind which engendered suspicion. She had suggested divers little refinements, betokening acquaintance with a higher range of art than she could have known except in very good places—nay, she had even ventured to advise her friend to reconsider certain directions, though they had proceeded from her mistress, and the alterations, having been made with tact, and attributed by the cook to her mistake, had been so favourably received that Mrs. Faunt was looked upon with more suspicion than ever. Where had she learned all these things? But the reception which she accorded to any inquiries was so exceedingly discouraging, and, to borrow a classical phrase of the day, so cheeky, that folks grew inclined to use her wisdom without asking whence it came. The young curate, Edward Grafton, had frequently spoken to her at the rectory (the arrangements of a country house preventing the utter strangeness which prevails between masters and servants in London), and his curiosity had been somewhat excited by the reports that were made of her culinary lore. He, however, learned no more about her than that she had a little money, and never went to church either in his father's parish or her own.

Upon the present occasion her discursive smile irritated Mr. Grafton, and her language was not likely to lessen his irritation.

"You have not been in the house all this time?" he said.

"Sorry to contradict a clergyman, but I have," said the widow.

"Did you hear me calling to you, when I came in?"

"Certainly I did, parson. It is a pleasure to hear your voice, it is so loud and distinct like."

"Don't speak to me in that manner, Mrs. Faunt, if you please. Why did you not answer when I called?"

"I suppose one is free to speak or not in one's own house. I have always heard that it was a castle. Perhaps that has been altered; but as I haven't heard of such being the case, you will excuse me."

"You are insolent, Mrs. Faunt."

"Really, parson, you seem inclined to blow up all the ladies this morning. I was going to ask you indoors, but I'm afraid that you will take to scolding me, and I warn you that I should not be quite so patient under bad language as the other lady who is gone."

"Do you mean that you have been playing the spy — listening to the talk of your betters?"

And Mr. Grafton again became exceeding red, this time with a more creditable feeling than mere shame that he had been overheard in somewhat wild talk. He felt for Magdalen, and raged that her future destinies should have been discussed in the hearing of an inferior. Of course, what he had said would be repeated, and fresh annoyance to Miss Conway would be the result. Place it to the credit of a man in love that he did not think of strangling the witness, but began to consider what money he had about him.

"If my betters choose to come into my garden and talk about their own business, I can't help it. I had a right to stand behind my door, and I stood there."

"Very unworthy conduct, Mrs. Faunt," said the

young clergyman. "You have been treated with all kindness at the rectory, and I came over to-day to tell you to be there on Wednesday, to do what you are always well paid for. I could not have thought that you would behave in this shameful manner."

"Perhaps you'll be good enough to point out the shamefulness, sir."

"Treacherous and base in the highest degree, Mrs. Faunt, and I am sorry that you do not perceive it."

"We must agree to differ, sir," said the widow, with the most appalling effrontery. "But you'll excuse my saying that after the name you was pleased to put to yourself, I may think that I am as likely to be in the right as a gentleman who owns himself to be a fool."

If Edward Grafton had not been a clergyman, he would probably have used a bad word at this new provocation. But he was too much in earnest in his fear of Magdalen's being annoyed by this woman's tongue, to give much regard to his own humiliation. He said, quietly —

"Well, Mrs. Faunt, a man *is* a fool who talks where he can be overheard. But as I suppose you value the kindness of the rectory, you will see that it will be wise in you to hold your tongue about anything that you may have heard. And to keep that in your recollection, just —"

"Just please to put up your porte-monnaie, sir."

Mr. Grafton stared with surprise, — first at the French word, pronounced far better than he could have sounded it; and secondly, at finding his intended gift refused. Nor was he pleased, for he had, though young, had some experience of the lower class, and he

knew that, when money is refused by them, in nineteen cases out of twenty they mean to be rewarded in some way which will suit you worse. He began to consider whether he could not get the woman summarily removed from Naybury — his father was a magistrate and had much influence with his brother magistrates — all of which was horribly tyrannical and un-Christian-like, of course. While he pondered, Mrs. Faunt spoke again.

"Wouldn't you like to poison me, sir?" she said, smiling the lax smile.

It was reserved for the assurance of an American gentleman, who used to be known in the theatrical world, to reply at the card-table to a person who said that he thought he had played a queen:

"I'll bet you five pounds, sir, that you thought nothing of the kind."

We will not presume to say what Mr. Grafton thought. What he answered was,

"Mrs. Faunt, I must beg you not to think evil of those who have behaved well to you. I do not know why you should refuse a little present I was going to offer you."

"I never cared for little presents, sir. And when I want a large present, I will take care to have earned it first. You said Wednesday, sir, I think?"

"Yes, Wednesday. You will come?"

"It will, perhaps, depend on yourself, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, sir, I don't say that I might be serving you better than in cooking your father's dinner, but you might think so. Will you please to walk in, sir? I'll undertake that there are no more listeners."

Edward Grafton entered the cottage, and the widow, dusting the only good chair for him, shut the door and seated herself upon the table. Sat up, well, on that throne, with her feet — smaller than might have been expected, and tidily shod — dangling. A more irreverent attitude for a cottager's reception of a clergyman's visit could not well be devised. Mrs. Bulliman's painful experiences never went so far as this. But it was not for Mr. Grafton, just then, to assert his dignity.

"Now, sir, one word for all. I may not be rich and all that, and I live in a cottage that some people wouldn't keep pigs in. But that is neither here nor there. I don't choose to be abused."

"No person should choose it, or do it," said Mr. Grafton, rather cowed.

"No, sir; but people do many things they oughtn't to. I mean that I expect whatever you may think of what I say, you don't come down on me with any parson-talk, because I won't have it."

And here, on the demand of this woman, did a priest of the Church instantly renounce his right to condemn sentiments which might for aught he knew be utterly atrocious.

"Very good, sir, a gentleman's promise is enough for me. And now, sir, will you please to let me remind you, but only in the way of business, of what you said, sitting on my bench outside?"

"Yes, yes," said Edward Grafton, "I know."

"Now, don't get angry again, sir. I have heard a good many persons say the same thing, never meaning it. But I ought to tell you that in regard to what you had in hand you certainly did go on like — well,

we'll say that foolish I couldn't have supposed in a gentleman who has seen the world."

"I know it, I tell you."

"Why, foolish as books are, I mean novels and that, they must have taught you that to abuse a young lady's plighted lover is the way to make her love him better, and hate you worse. I am almost ashamed to be swinging my legs on this table" (she ought to have been quite) "and telling such A B C to a gentleman. But it's no disgrace not to understand women. Some men never do to the end of their lives, yet they marry and have large families."

"Mrs. Faunt, I forgot myself. Is there any need to keep on upon the subject?"

"Well, no, but I want to know how much you are in earnest, Mr. Grafton. Because I may be throwing away my words."

"In earnest about what?"

"Wanting to break off the marriage," said Mrs. Faunt, putting her plump elbows on her knees, and looking her spiritual friend straight in the face, until he forgot how awry she was in every other particular but her dark black eyes.

"I believe that the marriage is not likely to produce happiness to the lady," said Mr. Grafton, "and therefore I desire to see it prevented."

"Come, young gentleman," said Widow Faunt, "I begin to have hopes of you. That bit of humbug was spoken so well that I think you will get on some of these days."

Edward Grafton, a gentleman by birth and education, writhed under this familiarity, which became worse and worse with every speech. But what was he

to do? A man can only exhaust the resources at his disposal. The woman would not take a bribe, and let him go away haughty and comfortable, and there was no choice between allowing her to speak as she chose, and the leaving the scene of the day at the mercy of her merciless tongue. He could but listen.

"I dare say I am very rude, and what you would think quite charming from a middle-aged lady of fashion who condescended to chaff you at dinner, is dreadful from a middle-aged low person sitting on a table in a hovel."

"Mrs. Faunt, you seem to me to have mixed in society very much above you."

"Do you call that polite, sir? How do you know it was above me? How do you know that I have not left it willingly, and am not doing penance for my sins in an old black frock? But never mind that, at least at present. Now, as to this marriage which you want broken off only for the sake of that young lady, who would not show you the book which her lover gave her, and which has the name of her ever affectionate and devoted Ernest in it."

"How do you know?"

"Serve you right to humbug you, I am blessed if it wouldn't. Why, I saw it through the door, of course."

"She never opened the book."

"No. I only wanted to see how close you noticed. But she had the book with her here one day when she came to visit me, and relieve my woes—good little soul. She would cry her eyes out, or thereabouts, if I were to tell her something which I could tell her."

"About the man she is engaged to?"

"About Mr. Ernest Dormer. You may not like him, but I am not going to speak rudely of an old friend."

"He is a friend of yours!"

"Awfully rude again. Why not? You said he was not so good as you, that you told the lady, and you are my friend — why not he?"

"Mrs. Faunt, you know something about that man, and his private character."

"And if I do, I hope I am too much of a lady to make an ill use of my knowledge, though a clergyman tells me to do it."

Not only had he to bear this, but in his turn to become the tempter.

"It is something that would prevent the marriage."

"I don't know. Such new-fangled notions have come up about things, and fathers and mothers are so different now from what they used to be. When I was a young lady, and marriageable, I fancy that my parents, if I had ever had any, wouldn't have looked twice at a gentleman who could not give a better account of himself than a friend of ours — or of mine, as you wont own him."

"Mr. and Mrs. Conway have all proper feelings on such subjects."

"Now you don't think so, for you have been talking to them to no purpose."

"And you knew that?"

"Yes, and I won't tell you how, at least to-day. Well, are you game to send me to London?"

"For what?"

"To make some inquiries, without which nothing that could be said could be proved, and you would be

called a slanderer, and the young lady would be carried off in glory by Mr. Dormer."

"Go, by all means, Mrs. Faunt. I feel that it is a right thing to ascertain the truth."

"How you gentlemen humbug yourselves, and everybody else. But that is no business of mine. Well, I will go to London. Give me ten pounds, in sovereigns, will you?"

"I have not so much with me, but I will get it, and bring it in an hour."

"No, I think you had better not be seen coming again to the Trafalgar. You are not such a regular visitor of the poor that you can be always here without being noticed. Don't be in a rage again: why should you come? It's not your parish, as you truly remarked. How much money have you got?"

Edward Grafton examined his porte-monnaie, and found a five-pound note and a sovereign.

"That would do, capital," said Mrs. Faunt, "but for the note. I must change it at the station, and it would be awkward to have it traced. I'm afraid I shall be driven to do what goes against my nature."

"What?"

"I must come to church. There's an evening service at your father's church to-night. I'll come, and I'll ask to speak to you in the vestry. Have the money ready, and you can make a show, if you like, of relieving me with half-a-crown, and wishing you saw me oftener at divine service. Then, I'll be off by the late train. You shall hear in good time how I get on."

And to this Edward Grafton had come, for the sake of his love and of his vengeance.

His meditations, as he left the widow's door, and

turned to the path across the fields between Naybury and Saxbury (the latter his father's parish) were of the most irritating kind, and Edward was not a man possessed of the enviable faculty of examining his troubles, one by one, summing up their value, and laying them aside. They constantly recurred to him, sometimes charging him singly, then in a flock, and again by instalments, until they had produced a general depression of feeling and a sense of persecution. To-day he had made a whole series of mistakes, which had ended in something like a disaster. He had begun by being rude to Miss Conway, he had actually insulted her by scoffs at her affianced husband, he had revealed to her that she had ample revenge in the existence of his own passion and the rankling torment of his rejection, and he had been left, contemptuously, while raving against her marriage and prophesying her misery. All this was not enough for the "crowded hour" of his misfortunes. Overheard by a low wretch of a woman, of whom he knew nothing but that she was audacious and cunning, he had been compelled to try to retrieve his original folly by an act which he vainly tried to justify as dictated by zeal for Magdalen's welfare. Edward had been educated by a father who had taken special pains to imbue him with a principle of pride, and the younger Grafton could not, with all the pertinacity of self-love and self-defence, argue himself out of the sense that he was acting worse than unworthily. Perhaps, had his tempter and agent been a more refined personage, his feelings would have been less humiliating, though the thing to be done would have lost none of its character. But that woman! The Widow Faunt to be the means of interfering with the destinies of

Magdalen Conway. Edward turned savagely round three or four times in the course of his walk, and as often resolved to return, and forbid Mrs. Faunt to proceed any further. Once he had a manly purpose. He would not only interdict the widow from action, but he would go up to Mr. Conway's, and have an interview with the parents, tell them of the interview, and express his sorrow that he should have forgotten himself. Then he would explain that his language had been overheard, by a person who was capable of trying to cause annoyance, and that he had thought it better at once to make his own confession, that the Conways might be prepared for any unpleasantness. And he would undertake that Magdalen should never hear another word from him that would give her pain. On this course he had nearly made up his mind, when the expression on Magdalen's face, as she left him, came back in all its scorn, and the good purpose was crushed.

He did turn, however, but it was to go into Naybury to obtain change for his bank note. He might perhaps have had a difficulty in getting this in the little village, and at all events his asking for it might be remembered in a place whose stagnation made every trifle an event. He obtained the gold at a shop where his mother dealt, a chemist's shop. As he came out he was accosted by a lady of ample proportions and costly garb, who was accompanied by two tall girls almost as richly arrayed.

"Ah, Mr. Edward," said the matron, "I hope that your being at Chervil's does not mean that anybody is ill at the rectory."

"Thanks, Mrs. Bulliman, no. We are all well."

He raised his hat, but the ladies had no intention of being so coldly greeted, and each insisted on shaking hands with him. Edward Grafton always disliked the family, but had now very good reasons for hating their very name. Still, he could not help shaking hands.

"I hoped that you would have come over last night to the school-house, Mr. Edward," said Mrs. Bulliman.

"I did not know that anything was going on."

"Why, Phœbe enclosed you a bill at my express desire."

Yes, and he had received it, and thrown it into the fire-place. He had not forgotten this, for his mother had fixed it in his mind by a gentle remonstrance touching the uses of a waste-paper basket, and the ridiculous little incident was full in his recollection as he gazed unlovingly in the face of the gaunt Phœbe.

"It must have miscarried," he said, unblushingly. He did not want to tell a falsehood, but he was in no humour to explain to the Bullimans that he was not interested in the mission to Madagascar, on which a lecture had been over-night delivered.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Edward, for it was a delightful lecture, and one which it was a privilege to have heard. Dear, good Mr. Yotes came home with us to supper, and I should have so liked you to meet him. His narratives of the way in which the poor islanders listened to his discourses were most touching, and brought tears into all our eyes."

"Who is Yotes?" said Edward, not caring in the least for the poor islanders.

"He is a missionary, and resided two years in that lovely but unhappy Madagascar. I am so sorry that you did not come over."

"I could not have come over, had I known of it," said Edward Grafton; "we dine at seven."

"Surely, on such an occasion, Mr. Edward, your father would have advanced his dinner-hour. We all dined at two o'clock, in order to have our tea just before coming, that we might be refreshed and attentive."

"I don't think my father would alter his dinner hour for all the missionaries and savages in both hemispheres, Mrs. Bulliman," said Edward. "At least, I know that I should not care to be the person to make the proposition to him."

"Phœbe shall transcribe and send you her notes of the lecture, Mr. Edward, for I am sure that you will read them with deep interest. Be sure that you do so, Phœbe."

"And I should like," said her sister, Sophia, "if mamma sees no objection, to send you a beautiful sermon which I heard in London, and which I was so fortunate — so favoured, I ought to say — as to be permitted to copy out. It is upon the subject of the Ashantee mission, which is in some respects even more interesting than that to Madagascar."

"We will not say more interesting, Mr. Edward," said Mrs. Bulliman, "but more peculiar, in consequence of the less civilised manners of the heathen in those dark places of the earth. I grieve to say that a suspicion arises that one of the dear missionaries has been eaten."

"I wish they were all eaten, Madam," cried Edward, utterly unable to bear the religious small talk any longer; and wishing them a compendious and scarcely courteous good morning, he hurried away.

"The root of the matter is not in that young man, my dear," said Mrs. Bulliman.

Edward, in quite as heathenish a state of mind as any of the poor islanders who had been privileged to listen to Mr. Yotes, now made his way homeward. He had undergone several of the revulsions of feeling which are common to an excitable but not strong nature, but in the end he was again under the Faunt influence, and he prepared to follow out the widow's plan. He had said truly, that the dinner hour at the rectory was seven, but he had not said that it was postponed until eight upon the occasions when there was an evening service, as on that day. When the Reverend Theodore Grafton, his father, shall be better known, it will be believed that such a service was none of his appointing. It had been instituted by his predecessor, an excellent clergyman of the Evangelical school, who thought that something more than had been the wont at Saxbury might be done for the spiritual good of its clowns. Mr. Grafton had not liked to do away with the arrangement, though he greatly detested it. He had done his best to get rid of the inconvenience, by causing it to be distinctly understood by any one who officiated that the sermon must be at an end by a quarter to eight, for the rectory dinner was never to be kept waiting.

The service was performed by Edward Grafton, and was not graced by the presence of his sire, who preferred sitting in his excellent library, and reading out of his fine, gentlemanly quarto volumes of the last century, to hearing religion expounded unto him by his own child. Nor did Mrs. Grafton attend this evening, though she loved to hear her boy deliver the

Liturgy, and to recollect how she taught him words of one syllable. This evening, however, the rector had commanded her to write letters for him, and to hear was to obey, in her case, with certain exceptions. Edward Grafton sometimes exercised himself by putting his best mind into his sermons, to the utter discomfiture of the mind of Saxbury. But to-night he was in no spirit to take more trouble with his work than was absolutely necessary, and the service was gone through in a perfunctory manner. He snatched from his sermon-box at home the first discourse which came to hand, and did not look at it until he spread it before him in the pulpit. It happened to be upon Men of Belial, on whom the writer was very severe of their treachery and false witness, but whom the preacher let off rather easily, reading in the most unimpassioned style the hard names by which he had called them. Perhaps he did not know what he was about — once or twice he was startled at the sound of his own voice, and found that he was bawling, he knew not why. Having given the benediction, he went into the vestry, and gave the Woman of Belial ten pounds, adding, privately, what was less like a benediction than should have been the wish of a pastor dismissing a member of his flock to travel by land or by water.

CHAPTER VIII.

The British Drama.

"MR. FLETCHER in?"

"In, of course he is," shouted a voice.

The question had been put by Mr. Francis Beaumont, dramatist, to the smiling little servant who

opened the street-door of a very tiny detached cottage in the old Brompton road. The answer proceeded from Mr. John Fletcher, dramatist, who was at the moment within two feet of his friend, but divided from him by the partition which formed the side of the exceedingly narrow passage.

"Enter, Francis," continued the voice of the unseen, a loud and cheery voice. "Don't lose yourself in those vast halls and labyrinths."

Two steps brought Mr. Beaumont into the parlour, and about four would have taken him across that miniature chamber. But he knew its smallness, and checked his manly stride as he entered.

"Yes, you may well look at the clock, old man," said Mr. Fletcher, from a sofa on which he was lying. "You were to be here at twelve, don't you know?"

"I were," responded his friend, quietly. He vouchsafed no further explanation until he had deposited his hat on the top of a bookcase, seated himself in an American rocking-chair, and lighted a pipe.

"*Ex fumo da lucem*," said the host.

"That sounds well for business — we have been at our Latin," replied Mr. Beaumont. "Well, I have seen Mallow."

"Yes, and we are to get to work?"

"Instantly, if not sooner. He likes the notion, and the burlesque is to be put into rehearsal the moment we are ready with it."

"Terms?"

"What we said. Not a word of objection."

"All right. And did you tell him anything about it?"

"Only the subject, and that we should avail our-

selves of the entire debility of his company, besides that he must engage Gracie Clare, which he at once promised to do."

"He is a brick. Better send her a line, and tell her immediately to begin to find her present manager disagreeable."

"I saw her yesterday, at Windsor, and asked her to look in here this afternoon, on the chance of our having something to say. Whereat her ladyship wunk a wink."

"Then, Francisco, the sooner we get to work the better, eh?"

"Much. What an infernal litter you keep this place in. I could not write in such a mess."

"You should invigorate your will, and teach it to dominate over accidents," said Mr. Fletcher. "But I admit that the room is not in what can with precision be called order."

He certainly spoke the truth, and the small room was in rather a chaotic state. Mr. Fletcher was a journalist as well as a dramatist, and therefore read all his contemporaries, whose broad sheets lay in little hills in the corners and under the table. On the latter there was no clear space, save the oasis presented by a blotting-book, the rest of the area being occupied by yellow French plays, English play-bills, a cigar-box, the Charivari, and printers' long proofs, which curled up like snakes, and which, had they been snakes, might have hissed the reluctance with which the author, like most of his brethren, set himself to the duty of correction. A Delphine Virgil also lay there, opened at the end of Book I., and near it a classical dictionary, signs well understood by Mr. Beau-

mont, and approved by that gentleman. Rescuing the volumes from the danger which menaced the rest of the contents of the table, Mr. Fletcher, with a Napoleonic sweep of the arm, suddenly sent nearly everything else to the floor. Nor let the smiling little servant be reproached that a cloud of dust arose. She was willingness and cleanliness embodied, but the solemn maledictions which Mr. Fletcher had two or three times pronounced, purposely within her hearing, against anybody who should unbidden "disturb" his papers, had been more effective than Shakspeare's curse upon those who should move his bones.

"Pardon my insinuating that you are a Pig, John," said his friend, as he watched the dust flying out at the open window and into the sunshine.

"The discovery is not novel," said Mr. Fletcher, coolly. "Many persons have made the same representation to me. You married parties get finikin notions into your heads, and fidget awfully. Will you have any refreshment — there's some Bordeaux at your right hand, or do you desire plebeian beer?"

"Neither, just now, thanks."

Mr. Fletcher then opened a drawer, produced some quarto paper, set some sheets and a clean pen before his friend and himself, and making a just division of ink-glasses, which he filled from a great stone bottle on the mantelpiece (spilling large drops upon the fender), looked Mr. Beaumont straight in the face, and observed,

"*Dido* — Gracie."

"Of course," said Beaumont; "but don't be in such a hurry."

Mr. Fletcher was a man of about thirty, rather

good-looking, with a bright expression of face, and a ready laugh. He had a very handsome moustache and a graceful beard, but not much hair. He was slight, and not tall. It need hardly be said that he was in what is courteously called a careless dress. Its chief feature was a nondescript article, whose maker might have had some glimmerings of the nature of a coat, but who had contrived something between a pea-jacket and a morning-gown. It had once been of a lilac colour, but you might now decline to state its hue, and yet not be accused of colour-blindness. There was no doubt, however, of the exceeding yellowness of a broad strap with which it had pleased Mr. Fletcher to gird his waist, and which he tightened, occasionally, when designing to show that he was much in earnest. But Mr. John Fletcher, when he came out of his cell into the world, was always correctly and even elegantly dressed, had his gloves on, and wore a flower.

Mr. Beaumont was a tall, powerfully-made man, not in the least resembling the ideal of a poet or a student, but looking much like a man of business. A first sight of him would not probably induce you to take a second, but when he spoke, the singularly pleasant and musical voice made you feel that the speaker was somebody whom you ought to like, and then you looked again, and observed that he had fine dark eyes, and that the smile was also fine — he did not laugh much. The sketch is complete when it has been said that he was well dressed. This had always been the case with him, and Mr. Fletcher's gibe at the refining influence of marriage was misplaced as regarded Mr. Beaumont, who had always been orderly, and outwardly respectable.

"Don't be in such a hurry," repeated John Fletcher. "But it behoves us to be in a hurry, doesn't it? The piece must be done as fast as we can do it."

"Just so; but don't begin to cast it until we have quite settled the story."

"Why, you have told Mallow what it is, unless you have been changing it on your own responsibility. Didn't we settle that it should be *Dido and Æneas*?"

"Of course, and Gracie Clare is to be *Dido*. But now for a little consideration. How is the story to be treated. I see you have been at Virgil, and one knows all that he has to say. But Virgil isn't everybody. And, first, let us see what Dr. William Smith has to say."

"I have read all that, my dear fellow; but here, look for yourself."

Beaumont carefully studied the learned page. Then he took his pen.

"Let us, in the first place, have everybody who is mentioned, and bother all attempt at accuracy," said the unscrupulous Mr. Fletcher.

"Certainly," returned his fellow-conspirator. "If the people did not all live at the same time, they ought to have done so, and who was Virgil, as benighted heathen, that he should have anachronistic privileges which are denied to two eminent Christian writers? Now, write down, will you?"

"*Ignis via.*"

"*Dido*, we've said. *Æneas*, of course."

"Who should play *The Pious*?"

"Let us get the characters out first, can't you?" said Mr. Beaumont. There's *Pygmalion*."

"Good name for a bill. He was a sculptor, wasn't

he? — and the statue came to life. Parody the scene at the end of the 'Winter's Tale,' with tragic imitations — deuced good."

"This was another Pygmalion altogether. But your ignorance is felicitous — we'll combine the characters. This one was Dido's brother, and enemy, and killed her uncle, who had married her."

"That wasn't very inimical. I call it rather a brotherly attention. Shall we have in the killing of the uncle, with a bit from the end of *Hamlet*? It will give a more elevated tone to the piece, and appeal to the legitimate beggars."

"We'll think. What shall we call him, *Sichæus* or *Acerbas*? either is correct."

"O, *Acerbas*, certainly. It sounds better; besides, there's a line ready made —

'*Acerbas* speaks with far too much acerbity.'

"Yes, or the same another way, as the cookery-books say —

'The ex-*Acerbas* shows exacerbation.'

"Then," said Fletcher, "there's *Ascanius* — a pretty little part for pretty little Maria Clive."

"And the sister, *Eliza*, that goes about crying, 'Why did you die?' — we might give her an Irish brogue, and make her wake Dido — make a note of that, I see some fun. *Hiarbas*, who was a king near Carthage, and wanted to marry *Dido* — we want him, of course."

"Carthage! By Jove, splendid! Hooray!" cried Mr. Fletcher, tightening his strap mercilessly. "Have you read *Salammbô*? We'll have her in, most decidedly. The costume alone, and the chain on her legs, will

draw everybody. Who's a large, handsome creature, in Mallow's company? She need not talk much, but she should be able to dance, and we might have a dance between her and the Holy Snake. I suppose that's about as much of the snake business as the licencer would stand," said the dramatist, sadly, and just then wishing that he lived in France.

"Yes, we'll have *Salammbô*," said Beaumont, slowly. "But it will be only for the stalls, I'm afraid. The great B. P. doesn't read that sort of thing."

"But the great British Public will come and see what the stalls say is good. We'll talk of this — it is the gem of the piece. If Mrs. Argyll would do it," Fletcher added, wistfully.

"Out of the question. *She'd* do it in a minute, and be only too delighted. But —"

"Yes, confound him, I suppose so. If he'd only break his neck in hunting," said Fletcher, thoughtfully.

"However, we can't have everything. Whom else have you got? The brave *Gyas* and the brave *Cloanthus*, friends of *Æneas* — they must be exactly alike, and say the same thing, we owe that deference to Virgil."

"We must have some more women; but first let us settle another point. Gods and goddesses, eh?"

"They've been worked to death."

"Yes, but they're always acceptable. You see the mass of people have learned the distinctive characters of the deities, and that is something. And the dresses are so lovely."

"Unless we know any other mythology that could be got in. The Scandinavians have been tried, but the B. P. hates new ideas, and Thor and Woden and Frigga don't please like Jupiter and Mars and Venus."

The Oriental gods are such duffers — Juggernaut, though, with a car up to the roof, and studded with nautch girls holding coloured lights, would tell. No, it won't do. We want Juno and Iris, you see, specially for the story."

"Yes, that's true," said Beaumont. "I told Mallow that we must have a magnificent finish. *Dido* prepares to burn herself on the funeral pile."

"End of *Sardanapalus*!" interjected his friend. "Do you remember Mrs. Kean's magnificent entrance?"

'I've lit the lamp that lights us to the stars.'

"Who doesn't? But the line's foolish. The idea of taking a lamp to find out a star."

"You have no poetry, Beaumont. Nobody has any poetry in him who keeps his papers in order."

"Never mind about that. I was saying that the pile is prepared, and *Dido* gets upon it. Well, she must not kill herself, you see."

"Then, what's the good of *Iris*, who comes down to help her out of life? I can't agree to give up that — the descent on the rainbow, and the drawing a thousand colours from the light, were expressly invented by Virgil with a prophetic view to our burlesque."

"Who wants to give it up? But we can't have anything melancholy at the end of the piece, can we?"

"No, the B. P. likes to howl only over sentimental costermongers and self-sacrificing scavengers. You must save *Dido*!"

"Of course. *Iris* will come down and sing a nigger melody, and so the rainbow scene will be shown, and then the goddess will take out a box of matches — warranted to light only on the lid — and fire the

pile. Awful conflagration for a minute; we'll have that capitally done — and then the pile sinks, and discloses *Aeneas*, returned, and kneeling at *Dido's* feet."

"That will do, I think, if they manage it properly."

"I assure you, Mallow saw the notion, and means to carry it out splendidly. I have not often seen him jump at a thing as he did. I think he must have heard that somebody else is at the same subject."

"Probably, and that accounts for his being eager to get on. However, that's his business. Ours is to go ahead. Let us knock out a programme of the scenes," said Mr. Fletcher. "How do we begin?"

"Seashore, I suppose. *Dido* and all her ladies amusing themselves; some going into bathing-machines, and afterwards seen dancing in the water. *Dido* orders her Poet-Laureate to sing a song, and we must have a ballet. Suddenly awful screams from the water, and all the bathing girls rush frantically forwards — the Biarritz dresses a little improved will tell capitally — and an awful sort of sea-monster is announced as coming, and this, of course, is *Aeneas*, who comes on shore with swimming belts all over him, and spluttering terribly, and abusing the ocean in the worst language, until he suddenly recollects that he is The Pious, and begins to sing a hymn. Then he sees *Dido*. Venus at the moment appearing, and making him an elegant party, he introduces himself, as in Virgil."

"You had better write that scene, as you have thought it over, hadn't you? But I don't like *Dido's* being on — she ought to have an entrance."

"Yes, that's true. Well, let's see. Oh, that's easy enough — she shall come on while they are at their

games, and blow them up for playing on Sunday. That's good, and we'll get in some hits at Sabbatarianism — please the gallery — bit of clap-trap. What, the only day the poor man has a chance to view the green face of Nature — and all that. *Probatum est.*"

"Shall I see Vetch about the music?"

"Yes, by all means. But we'll ask Gracie Clare whether she has got anything striking for her opening air. Talking of the angel, here she comes," said Beaumont, looking out at the window. "Now, that's truly dramatic, isn't it?"

"Theatrical, but not dramatic, Mr. Beaumont. Go and let her in."

In a minute more, Gracie Clare, the young actress, touching whose performance in the *Demon and the Dumpling* honourable mention was made at the banquet given at the Octagon, entered the little room, and brightened it, as a girl's presence only can brighten a prosaic apartment. Not regularly pretty, but with features to which stage appliances lent a ravishing beauty, at least in the eyes of those who knew nothing of such appliances, Gracie had a saucy smile, which did execution upon the wisest and most hardened of her admirers. She was not very clever, but the smile was very clever indeed, and men who had just heard her utter either nonsense or commonplace, would, in defiance of themselves, affix wit or finesse to her chatter, merely from the force of that remarkably knowing movement of lips. Miss Clare had bright eyes, a complexion which had not been much injured by stage work, and which was brown and healthy, and the graces of her rounded figure were recognised by all western London. Finally, her real name was not

Gracie Clare but Jane Nobb, and deducting an odd story, which those who liked her declared to be without foundation, and to have originated in her extreme kindness to an orphan, she was a reasonably good, as well as a very good-natured girl. Moreover, she knew how to dress herself, off the stage, as well as to undress herself for going on it, and as her mother, Mrs. Nobb, a respectable greengroceress in a small way, observed, it was no matter, however promiscuous you might meet her, she were always looking like a lady. Which is more than can be said of everybody who actually is a lady, as may be seen by men who venture into the suburbs before lunch time.

"Well, you two conspirators," said Miss Clare, "what deeds of dreadful note are you at now?"

"Take the rocking-chair, Gracie," said Mr. Fletcher.

"Shan't," said the young lady. "It endangers my showing my ankles, about which I am very particular. Besides, I dare say it is awfully dusty. You want me here for a day, John Fletcher, to set you to-rights."

"And to stay every day, and keep me so," returned the gallant Fletcher.

"With a timmy ummy tiddy uddy ido," sang out Miss Clare, in light scorn of a compliment. However, she sat down in the rocking-chair, and surveyed her friends.

"Gracie," said Francis Beaumont, "Mallow wants you, and he'll give you —"

"Yesterday's fish," remarked Miss Clare, elegantly. "Mallow has got me."

"That's looking alive, though," said Fletcher. "Why, it is not a couple of hours since you saw him, Beaumont."

"When did *you* see him, Gracie?"

"Not at all. But his Fat Totum called on me yesterday, and proposed terms which I was graciously pleased to accept. I see all about it. You are doing a piece, and you have got the artful Mallow to promise to engage me for it, and lo, and behold, he had already engaged me. I suppose I ought to have kept that cat in the bag, but I never could be cruel to a dumb animal."

"What an old dodger it is," said Beaumont. "Why couldn't he tell me that?"

"It is not his nature to," said Fletcher, "any more than it's the nature of the animal Grace mentions, to walk straight to you."

"Mystification pure and simple, and for its own sake; for what on earth was he to get by it?"

"Nature, my friend, has once been defined," and the definition will last as long as nature herself."

"'Nature's a rum un,' said Mr. Squeers.' Is that what you mean?"

"That, and all philosophy can get no farther. Adding that Mallow is also a rum un, let us dismiss that dart of the subject, and come to Gracie."

"I don't want you to come to me. Sit where you are, and tell us what you are doing for me."

"A stunning burlesque part," said Mr. Beaumont, "and that is all that it is good for you to know at present."

"I understand. You're afraid that I shall let out your precious subject. But I can keep a secret, my dear young men."

"So they say," said John Fletcher, nodding.

"Don't shake your gory locks at me, sir, but tell me what you mean by that."

"I mean that you are everything that is prudent, and discreet," said Mr. Fletcher. "Do you think that I should be so madly attached to you as I am, if you were otherwise?"

"We shall have a word of a sort, John Fletcher," said Miss Clare, a little angrily, "one of these days, if you hint at things which you don't choose to explain. It is so noble, isn't it?"

"I like to see you in earnest, Gracie."

"Do you? I advise you not to put me too much in earnest," replied the girl. "But I always thought I was a fool," she added, the smile returning, "and now I know it. You ought not to have had a rise out of me."

"If I didn't like you so much, I wouldn't tease you, Gracie."

"Thank you for considerably less than nothing, John," was the pert rejoinder. "Well, but I say, gentlemen authors. I am to open with Mallow in this piece of yours. Give me some notion of the sort of thing. Am I a man or a woman?"

"Woman."

"Bother. I say, make it a man."

"Can't be," said Beaumont. "Such a fine part—all the talking, and all the acting. And there's nobody in the theatre can touch it, or come near it, but you."

"Mallow promised that I should play Apollo, or some other man."

"You said you had not seen Mallow. Don't tell stories, Gracie."

"The Fat Totum promised it—come now."

"He wouldn't dare. Don't tell stories, Gracie."

"I am sure you might manage it, if you chose," said Miss Clare, plaintively. "If it was only John Fletcher, I would have it done, too, see if I wouldn't, but you, Frank Beaumont, you are as obstinate as two hundred and fifty mules and a donkey."

"When you hear the part, and read what the press will say of you the morning after, you will go down on your knees and beg my pardon for ever having asked me to take such a character from you. It gives name to the piece, and as I tell you, all the work is in it. And you want that transferred to Mrs. Argyll!"

"Yes, she'd be a nice person to give it to, certainly. You'd have to stick a dentist at the wing to keep putting aitches into her mouth. Well, I suppose I can't help myself. What sort of dresses are they?"

"Classical," said Fletcher.

"Well, then, I won't play the part, there. A woman's classical dress is just about as ineffective as possible. O, it's classical piece, is it? Well, then, give me one of the male characters. I don't care how slight—with a song or two—and I'll undertake to make something of it. Come, be good children."

"Don't be a goose, Gracie," said Beaumont, who began to feel as a man of business does when business is interrupted by caprice. "You'll play this part, or none at all. I think you may trust Fletcher and myself to look after your interests."

"Very well, give it to Mrs. Argyll," said Miss Clare, the tears coming into her pretty eyes.

"I don't know," said the relentless Beaumont, "that she could not do a good deal with it, especially

if we treated it in the way, Fletcher, of which we were speaking. Her figure would tell. And Gracie Clare shall play in the next piece we do, by which time she will have repented of mistrusting old friends."

Mr. Francis Beaumont was a married man, and if Mrs. Francis Beaumont had happened to look in at the open window at that moment, she might have been at least as much surprised as delighted to see a pretty girl jump out of her chair, throw her arms round Mr. Beaumont's neck, and give him a tearful kiss.

"You cross old patch, I'll play what you like to give me, but don't scold me like that."

"All for your good, my dear Gracie," said Mr. Beaumont, calmly. He did not return the salute, but he gave the crying girl a kindly sort of hug, and replaced her in her seat.

"Let all differences be drowned in the flowing bowl," said John Fletcher, tendering Gracie a tumbler of Bordeaux, which she took, and, with a nod to each, signifying that pacific relations were restored, finished.

"Not bad tippie," was the young lady's criticism. "And now, if I thought that I should not leave you in misery for having vexed me, I would go away, but as I said just now, I never could be cruel to dumb animals."

"But I want to say a word to you, Gracie," said Beaumont. "If you have any fancy for any particular air, to sing in the piece, speak now or for ever hereafter hold your peace."

"Having taken my physic like a good child, now I am to have my sugar-plums. I am sure it's very considerate of you! I will think. Here's another man

coming. Is it a dramatic author? No, I think it's a gentleman," she said, with a capital assumption of the manner of a servant-girl, who sees a visitor for her master. "I know who it is. It's Ernest Dormer. And I know where *he* has been."

"You don't," said Beaumont, "but if you think you do, I recommend you to say nothing about it before him."

"Oh, I dare say, Mr. Hypocrisy. I am told that you are fond of private theatricals, and are not altogether bad, though you are much too long for the stage, and rather a stick. Did you ever play Dr. Cantwell? I shall just say what I like."

"Beaumont is right, Gracie," said Fletcher, again tightening his strap, and winking.

"Don't wink at me," said Miss Clare, "because it's vulgar; and if there's one thing I hate and detest more than another it's vulgarity."

Whereat Ernest Dormer came in, and was cordially welcomed by Fletcher, and perhaps a little less cordially by Beaumont.

"Well, Miss Gracie," said Ernest, gaily, and with a nod which showed that, like Marmion and Lady Heron, they were friends of old, "are they taking your measure?"

"Pretending," said Gracie; "but they are shocking bad tailors. I am glad that you have come to help them."

"I should not presume to try," said Dormer. "I congratulate you, Miss, on being in such good hands. Now we shall see you in something worthy of your —" he pretended to hesitate, and added, laughingly — "figure."

"Just what you won't," replied the actress, seriously.

"I thought we had settled that matter," said Beaumont.

"Have every confidence in them, Gracie," said Ernest. "Not that I need advise you to have confidence."

"Come, don't you be rude," said Miss Clare. "I always tell everybody that you are a model, and a true woman's friend."

"Ah, but where to find the true woman, Miss Gracie?" said Ernest, lightly.

"You have no right to say that," replied Gracie, with point; and Beaumont looked up at her from the book he was again examining.

Ernest Dormer perhaps did not care to answer the remark.

"I have been calling on Walter Latrobe," he said to the men, "and I found he had got a child's party all to himself. The prettiest sight you ever saw — about a dozen or fifteen little things all screaming with ecstasy, while Walter, in an Indian dress, was doing juggler's tricks for them. I wanted to talk to him particularly, but I had not the heart to disturb their fun. So I have looked in to disturb yours."

"I dare say that there were other places about here where you might have been welcome," said Grace Clare, "and where you might have seen pretty children."

"No doubt," said Ernest, quietly. "But I should have seen nothing so pretty as Miss Gracie Clare."

"And that's a story, too," said the irrepressible Grace. "Mr. Fletcher, I think that I have already desired you to abstain from winking at me."

Which observation, it will be perceived, was not mere fun, but was designed to tell Ernest Dormer that his friend had signalled.

"Nothing can be ruder," said Mr. Dormer, "except John's not asking me to have some wine. Not that I want any, though, for I was wise enough to take a glass of something excessively nice and cool and unwholesome, which Latrobe had brewed for his children."

Grace Clare looked as if she was going to say something else which the authors did not wish her to say, so Beaumont cut in.

"I dined at the Octagon on Tuesday, Dormer. Very good dinner indeed. Milwarden asked me, and I heard something of a remarkable banquet at which you had been a distinguished guest."

"Yes, it was a thing to remember," said Dormer, with a look that showed he understood why Grace had been winked at. "Who dined with Milwarden besides yourself?"

Before Beaumont could reply, Miss Clare rose.

"Oh, if you are going into your club talk, it is time that a lady should retire," she said. "Now mind, you two, I'm not above half friends with you, and it will only be a kind thing to a poor, struggling, unprotected—"

"Eh?" said Ernest, laughing.

Grace's sudden look was by no means so amiable as the mock piteousness which she had assumed. But she finished her appeal.

"I say it will only be a kind thing if you send me a note to-night, to tell me that you two have thought better of it, and done what I asked you. I don't ex-

pect it; for of all the obstinate pigs in Europe, an author is the worst, and when there are two they back up one another. However, them's my sentiments, and adieu, with tears. How's Lucy, Ernest Dormer?" "Perfectly well, I trust," said Mr. Dormer, without the slightest manifestation of surprise. He had been prepared for the parting shot.

"My best love to her."

"When I have an opportunity I will make a point of delivering your kind message," said Ernest, with the tone he would have used in a drawing-room. The manner, and his steady look at Grace, were too strong for her, and without another word she whisked herself off the premises.

The authors, as Dormer turned from the door, which he had politely opened, and resumed his seat, were both looking at their paper, and on the lips of each there was a sort of half-vexed, half-amused expression.

"I fear you are not in her good books, for all her praises, Ernest," said Fletcher.

"I ought to be," said Dormer, "for I got Mangles to give her no end of a puff, totally undeserved. Such is life, to hazard a novel meditation. But I see that you want to get to work, and I won't hinder you. Just let her ladyship walk out of sight, as I am not exactly anxious to take up the conversation where it left off."

"You don't hinder us," said Beaumont, without reference to the last words. "We have knocked out a sort of programme of a burlesque, and I don't think we can do much more with it to-day. Can you give us any ideas?"

"I should think not. To tell you the truth, I am rather out of sorts, or out of temper, or what you like, to-day, and I should only be a dull colleague. I specially wanted to see Latrobe, and had primed myself with something I wished to say to him, and I find him beleaguered by babies. He would have come away from them, of course, but you know what a man is when he is consulted at a time when his mind is somewhere else. What's your subject?"

"Dido and Æneas — keep it dark, of course," said Beaumont.

"That goes without to say, as the French have it," replied Dormer, with an attempt to be cheerful. "A capital one. Nothing is likely to occur to me that you won't think of, but I'll turn it over. Shall you bring in Creusa?"

"We had not thought of her — would she be useful?" said Fletcher, doubtfully.

"Well, I don't know that she would," said Dormer. "He deserted her cruelly enough, and that's not an agreeable subject. I think you are right. Good-bye, both, and good luck."

"Thanks," said both, as the door closed behind him.

"I know — at least I guess — what he wants with Walter Latrobe," said Fletcher.

"I fancy I do," said his friend. "And it is like Ernest Dormer to select the kindest fellow out, for the business."

"Not so kind to Walter, though," said Fletcher.

"Well, no. I had to do it once, and I'll quarrel with the best friend I have in the world — you, John, for instance — sooner than undertake it again."

"I shan't trouble you in that line," said Fletcher, laughing, and once more tightening his strap. "But there's trouble and weeping coming for somebody," he added, gravely. "And now, where can we get in a dance for *Dido*?—that monkey is so proud of her horn-pipes."

CHAPTER IX.

In the Garden.

"SHE is a long time, to-day," said Mr. Conway to his wife. "I hope that she has met with nothing unpleasant."

"My dear William, what can she have met? It is like your dear old fidgetting ways when we lived in London, and when you made yourself uncomfortable if I stayed out an hour later than I had intended. Do you recollect sending the clerks to look after me one evening, when I had gone to Islington?"

"Yes, and how you scolded me for it."

"Not much scolding, though it would have served you right. But don't keep looking at your watch. Do you not know that a woman never comes while she is being waited for?"

"No. But I remember one woman who never kept me waiting; and indeed was generally impatient enough to be before her time."

"If you refer to Mary Herbert, sir, you tell a story."

"Mary, another thing occurs to me, and I mention everything to you, just as it springs to my mind. This may be nonsense."

"I will bet that it is, William," said Mrs. Conway, laughing.

"No matter. Did you see Magdalen after she had read her letter to-day?"

"No, I went into the greenhouse, and she was gone when I came out."

"Well, I did. I watched her from my dressing-room window."

"What made you do that?"

"Why, it is so delightful to see the girl thoroughly happy, that I could not help having a look at her as she sat in the shade, studying the letter. I wish I had not looked."

"Why, my dear soul?" said Mrs. Conway, anxiously.

"Because the letter brought her no happiness, I am certain of that."

"How can you say so! You mean that she did not laugh heartily, or kiss the letter, or make any demonstrations that you could see. Don't you know that there is such a thing as quiet happiness, which is the best sort of all, and which we enjoy in silence. No, I don't think you ever understood that, William. You are too restless to have known it."

"There is some truth in what you say, dear. But I have had plenty of happiness, thanks to you, in my own way."

"And I hope you will have much more."

"Much, I don't know about. I am getting old."

"I will throw something at you if you talk in that way. If you are old, what am I? Hold your tongue, if you cannot be more polite to your wife."

"But about Magdalen, dear. I will tell you more. I *am* growing old, for I cannot see so well at a distance as I could, and I was so annoyed at what I

thought I saw in her face that I determined to be sure that I had not been mistaken. I contrived to meet her, as she came through the hall."

"Well?"

"Well, how does she usually meet me? Either she laughs, and pretends to strike me as she goes past, or she stops and kisses me, or she flourishes her letter at me, or does some playful bit of nonsense that shows she is happy. To-day she only looked at me, did not speak, and went up to her room."

"Mighty thing to fidget about, truly. You are more like a jealous lover than a fond father. She had already kissed you three times — once when she came down to breakfast, and twice at the window, for teasing her. As to her being pre-occupied, perhaps Ernest had sent her some wonderful anagram, like those he made the other night, and she was puzzling at the solution. My dear William, do get your straw hat and go round the garden, and shake yourself out of your fidgets before Maggie comes back."

"Come with me, then."

"O very well, anything to cure you."

They went out, beyond the lawn, and through an arch cut in a thick holly-hedge, into a large garden, chiefly laid out for kitchen uses, but in the centre of which there was a grass plot, with a small summer-house.

The change, however, did not work upon Mr. Conway as his wife had intended.

"I wish that Magdalen would show you that letter," he said, digging viciously, with a cane, at an unobtrusive weed, which, as many unobtrusive people do, offered unexpected resistance to ill-treatment.

"I can hardly ask that, dear. But she often shows me passages of his letters, and makes only a funny pretence of being mysterious about the rest. At all events, let us see how she looks when she comes in."

"That will be no evidence, because an occupation like that on which she is gone, will have removed the first impressions of the day."

"I never knew anyone so determined to find grievances, and if he cannot find them, to make them. If she comes in laughing, you will say that it is kindly and filial hypocrisy, to prevent our suspecting anything, I suppose."

"I cannot help my nature, my dear. It has lasted me a good many years, and will last me to the end, I dare say."

"Yes, yes, we know all that," said Mrs. Conway, laughing; "and how your wife cured you of a great deal of such nonsense. But this incessant self-worry is another matter."

"I do not remember enduring it much, except in regard to Maggie," said Mr. Conway. "Perhaps it is a presentiment."

"That is downright heathenish talk, William," said Mrs. Conway, more emphatically than the calm-natured woman was accustomed to speak. "Presentiment, indeed! what does that mean? A supernatural warning, and yet a warning so stupidly given that we cannot tell what it means. I am really ashamed of you, with your splendid education and talents, to talk like an old woman who is sure that the house is going to catch fire because a toad came out of the coal-hole."

"I only threw out the idea, my love."

"Throw it out of your mind altogether, then, as I

throw this snail out of the garden," said Mrs. Conway, suiting the action to the word.

"Our neighbour, Jameson, is not a dissenter, my dear Mary."

"Who said he was? What do you mean?"

"I thought you and Maggie were reading Dr. Johnson's life, that's all. You have not come to the passage. When you do, you will understand."

"No, he is not a dissenter," said Mrs. Conway, (who, like a great many very dear women, was quite content to await an explanation of a story until it came to her, or to go without it altogether) "but he is not much of a churchman. He sits under his cedar-tree, on Sunday morning, and reads newspapers, and smokes a cigar."

"In that case you were quite right to throw him the snail, a heathen. But has not his abstinence from church something to do with the excessive badness of the sermons?"

"Who is he, to set himself up as a judge? Why, he has not lived in the parish above six months!"

Mr. Conway laughed.

"How long, then, does it require to give a man a right to vote that his parson is a bore? I thought I gained that franchise very soon after coming here."

"Yes, but you go to church."

"Well, you take me there. I suspect that would be the answer of a very large number of obedient husbands, my dear, who pass for very religious men. But I own I am often tempted to say that we will go and hear Mr. Grafton, instead of our good old mumble-plum."

"That I am sure we never will. I consider that Edward Grafton has behaved exceedingly ill."

"We talked that over, and I think each of us retains the opinion each began with. But I did not mean to go and hear a boy like Edward. I should like an occasional sermon from the old rector."

"I should not. In the first place, I should not choose to encourage him," said this irreverent lady (whose notions of the divine right of the priesthood were vague), "after Edward's conduct; and in the second place I don't believe that he is sincere."

"Encouraging a rich old rector, of an ancient family, by hearing him preach, my dear Mary, is a very womanly way of looking at your spiritual relations with your clergy. But I admit that the insincerity, if it exists, would be a strong objection to my going to his church. I cannot tell, however, why you make that charge. He is very much respected."

"I don't know. He has a tall commanding figure, white hair, and a sonorous voice, and is so full of pride that he can hardly hold together. I wonder whether the twelve apostles had their family pedigrees stuck up in their halls, with a great tree growing out of the stomach of a man in armour?"

"It may be doubted, my dear Mary; but times have changed, and you must pardon my saying that the illustration is rather of the sort dear to a very low type of church-reformer, one who usually criticizes the mitre while holding the pewter."

"I dare say, but I have no patience with such pride. Besides, there are some very odd stories whispered about that rectory."

"Where are they not whispered? We seem to

have changed characters, my dear, and it is you who deal in unpleasantnesses. Perhaps odd stories are whispered about ourselves, perhaps about Magdalen."

"William!"

"Well, I merely put a supposititious case. Certainly we got this property fairly enough, and even poor old Captain Brocklyn never denied that, in his wildest days of boiled rum; and the reports of the trial are before the world. But who knows whether we forged no deeds, no tombstones, no other evidence that helped us into possession?"

"What things you imagine!"

"Such things have been. What do they say about the rectory?"

"I thought that men never cared to hear scandal?"

"We ought not to wish to hear it — and yet I don't know. All facts have their place in history — anyhow, tell me what they say about the Graftons."

"Well, it is not very clear. He, you know, is more proud than —"

"Than all the twelve apostles. We agreed to that."

"I was going to mention something quite different, but it is better not. You know what I mean."

"The Devil, in point of fact."

"Well, never mind. Old Mr. Grafton is awfully proud."

"Yet he did not disdain the alliance of the Conways."

"Disdain, indeed!" said Mrs. Conway. "Your daughter is a match for any nobleman, and though my

father was a bookbinder, he was a gentleman, which is more than Mr. Grafton is, if all stories be true. I think that the condescension would have been on our side."

And it was rather pleasant to see the kindly matron bristle up, for a moment, in honour of her husband and her child, exactly on the spot where she had pronounced her little homily against pride.

"Well, my dear Mary, though we have been spared the necessity of exercising the condescension you speak of so humbly, I should like to know the dangers that we have escaped. I hope Mr. Grafton does not hold incorrect views upon sublapsarianism."

"I don't suppose he knows what it means, any more than I do."

"It is distinguished from superlapsarianism, my love, by — but on second thoughts, as you have done without the knowledge a long time, without suffering any sensible inconvenience, you may as well go on not knowing."

"With all my heart. But what is said about Mr. Grafton is, that when he was a young man he got into all sorts of entanglements, some of them not of a very honourable character."

"Pecuniary, of course?"

"Yes, and of another sort, and both connected together."

"I am equally entangled in your mystery."

"We have dined at the rectory three times, you remember, William."

"Yes, and as I am a thin man, I pay most attention to the eating, which was very good. I heard hints that the less of the wine one took the better. I took very little, and I don't seem to remember a headache,

which is more than I can say of the next day after a Bulliman dinner."

"Don't be hard on poor Mr. Bulliman. It is her fault. She checks the wine-bill, and says that it is un-Christian to pay nine shillings a bottle for claret, while a single Hottentot is unable to read the Bible."

"Does she apply the rule to her own milliner's bills, as that would be more apposite? She dresses sumptuously. However, I shall not have it out with her, as I shall dine there no more. What imports the nomination of the rectory dinner?"

"Why," said Mrs. Conway, making a successful shot at his meaning, "do you recollect that upon two occasions, but not the last, there dined a dark-looking lady, who was both times said to be staying in the house? She was in black velvet, if you ever noticed a woman's dress."

"Did not I just show that I noticed Mrs. Bulliman's? Yes, I remember that lady perfectly well. What skeleton does she represent, what horror does she embody? Is the rector a bigamist, and is she one of his wives? We ought not to visit him."

"No, but it is curious that your nonsense has come not so very far from the truth, if it be truth that the people speak. It is believed that Mr. Grafton did marry when he was young, and married disreputably. That wife is dead."

"I am glad of that, for the sake of the kind, lady-like woman now known as Mrs. Grafton, Edward's mother. By the way, is that another jump in the dark? Is she Edward's mother?"

"O yes, that is certain. He was born in the parish, to which his father came soon after the second mar-

riage, bringing Mrs. Grafton as a bride. But the lady we speak of is in some way connected with the first wife."

"Well, but, my dear, what is there in that? Mrs. Grafton knows, of course, of the early folly, and if her husband has explained to her that this person, what is her name — Sulton — something —"

"Sullage — they call her Mrs. Sullage."

"Probably because she married a Mr. Sullage. The reason is not altogether bad. Well, if Mrs. Grafton accepts this lady's visits, we must suppose that it is all right."

"If you would only let me explain. They say that Mrs. Grafton hates and fears this woman, and that it is only in consequence of the strongest pressure on the part of the rector that his wife even consents to be in the house with her."

"But if Mrs. Sullage be an objectionable character, you and Magdalen ought not to have been asked to the house."

"I do not understand that she is objectionable in that sense, but that she knows something so bad about the proud old rector, that he is compelled to force her upon his wife and her guests whenever she chooses to come."

"Now I should much like to know," said Mr. Conway, "out of what flimsy materials the Naybury gossips have made a story that sounds alarmingly like what one has read in a good many bad novels."

"I did not like to tell you before, though I would have done so if the affair between Magdalen and Edward Grafton had not been instantly broken off by her. The story was partly suspected for a long time,

but much new light was thrown on it by Edward himself."

"Filial conduct. His father has behaved well to *him*, at any rate."

"That, also, may not be so certain. But I do not know enough about that to warrant my saying anything. Edward revealed some of the other part of the story one night at a certain house in Naybury, when he had had more than was good for him."

"And who was hospitable enough to make a young fellow tipsy, and then betray his foolish revelations?"

"There has been no betrayal, my dear William. The person who heard it did so most reluctantly, and has kept the secret."

"How can that be? Whose house was it?"

"Yours."

"This. And who heard the story?"

"I."

"You, Mary?"

"Yes. Edward was, at the time, at Cambridge, and had come to the rectory in consequence of a summons from his father. You were, at the time, in London, at the laying the first stone of your cousin's church. Edward Grafton came here in a state of much excitement, but not from drink. But a very little drink, which he insisted on having, simply set him maundering, and he began accusations of such a kind against his father, and in reference to Mrs. Sullage, that I was driven to do a prompt thing, and I am sure a right one. If I had a son, and he could so act, I hope that a mother who might be with him would do as I did. I resolved that the servants should hear

nothing of his talk, and I gave him the strongest opiate I dared. He slept on a sofa, and next morning was gone. Am I not to be trusted with a secret?"

CHAPTER X.

Honor a Nilo.

ADMIRABLY well as Magdalen Conway had behaved — and knew that she had behaved — during the stormy interview with Edward Grafton, before the cottage of Mrs. Faunt, the young lady reached her home in no triumphant state of mind. At a very early period in her homeward walk her lofty mood had become subdued, and sad as it may be to admit the fact, in regard to a heroine, she largely partook of the dispositions of which Sir Hugh Evans accuses himself while endeavouring to sing. Magdalen indeed was very much inclined to cry. But, happily, she met no one whose greeting or whose talk was in the slightest degree sympathetic; and though she felt by no means grateful to two or three acquaintances whose well-meant boredom compelled her into the common-places of casual chatter, she was really conscious that such meetings had acted somewhat bracingly upon her. Hastening to the house, and avoiding conversation with her parents, Magdalen locked herself into her room for a little counsel with herself.

Into the various turns and phases of that consultation it were not discreet to enter, but it is well that something should be known of the course of Magdalen's thoughts, the rather that such knowledge will illustrate some of the past passages in her history.

The scene with Edward Grafton seemed to have

retreated, and to have become an event of some time back instead of a dialogue of an hour ago. In place of the active displeasure which Magdalen had felt during the conversation, there had arisen a general sense of discomfort and disturbance, and a gentle-natured girl felt that a hostile influence had been set up against her, and that it would cause her trouble and grief. But this was not the thought which rose up strongly and persistently. That thought was connected with her affianced husband.

Trained to self-examination, Magdalen, almost as soon as she became conscious that something of apprehension, something of dissatisfaction was growing up within her in regard to Ernest Dormer, suddenly turned sternly upon herself, and demanded whether such feelings owed anything to the words of Edward Grafton. For they had been bitter and menacing words, and though she had dashed aside his slanderous imputations, they were of a kind to be remembered involuntarily, and to bear fruit in bad season. From any such suspicion Magdalen believed that she was free. She thought that she should despise herself if the avowedly hostile tongue of a rejected lover could work injury to Ernest with one who had promised to be his wife. She placed before her Grafton's conduct, and its motives, and she convinced herself that what was prompted so despicably was altogether without influence upon herself. And in self-justification from the charge which she had imagined, Magdalen recurred to her feelings before leaving home in the morning, and after reading Dormer's letter. This confirmed her in her belief that all which she felt as to her lover she had felt before he had been attacked, but it is hardly ne-

cessary to tell a woman-reader that the conviction brought no accession of comfort to poor Magdalen. Somehow, she wished that she had not done Ernest so much justice, when the idea that she had done him a little injustice would have strengthened her in another way.

However, there was his letter, his kind, graceful, loving letter, and Magdalen read it again and again. It seemed very spontaneously written, but if Magdalen Conway had only known the pains the writer had taken with the composition, and what we may call the honest art with which he had sought to make it inartificial, and to remove from it all appearance of the effort with which it was really framed, it may be doubted whether Miss Conway would have deigned to look at it so earnestly, and to try to see in it that without which the most charming epistle is — to a woman — worthless in comparison with the clumsiest utterance of a genuine feeling. Ernest had tested his work very severely, by such means as were within his power, and he had re-written his letter twice, and, finally, had done very well. But the touchstone, reluctantly applied, gave a merciless verdict. The metal was not genuine, and poor Magdalen knew that though her eyes blinded themselves with tears her heart failed not to see the fatal signs.

It was not — be it said to her best credit — while this conviction agitated and even angered her, that Magdalen permitted any of the worldly features of her case to present themselves to the detriment of Ernest Dormer. Something nobler than a girl's grief, something of a woman's sorrow came upon her, and it was over herself, and her own outraged heart that she

brooded, in the first mood of an unrequited affection — shall we say during the mood of selfishness? The word is ungracious, but it is certain that a woman, in this stage of trouble, is self-engrossed, and it is not for us to offer apologies for nature. But the sorrow rises high above the sentiment which prompts accusation or reproach. There was no harsh thought for Ernest Dormer, as his affianced wife sat with her head between her hands, and, swaying slowly backwards and forwards, accepted — no, submitted to the truth — that she was not loved.

“And I would have loved him so well,” she said, in a low voice.

Would have loved him.

With which words begins another page in the book of Magdalen’s history.

Plainly, for we would have no riddles, it may be said that at all events she had not loved him as yet.

We must therefore look back for a little, into her history. It will be considered a fair measure of frankness if as much is told about Magdalen Conway as is known to Ernest Dormer, who is engaged to marry her.

Magdalen, the only child of William and Mary Conway, had been carefully educated, by their side, until she was about sixteen. After what has already been said, it is needless to add that she had been idolized, but could not be spoiled, by her parents, and that in the only school in which those who appreciate the treasure sent in the form of a daughter will ever allow her to study, the school of a home where love is, Magdalen had acquired the graces of education, without losing certain good gifts too often found to have been left behind, like schoolmistress’s perquisites, when a girl is

withdrawn from a stranger's care. Pure, *naïve*, bright and affectionate, Magdalen Conway grew up beside her natural protectors, and repaid their protection tenfold. The instruction which she had received was of the best kind. Her mother, though imperfectly educated, had the soundest sense as well as the kindest heart, was perfectly aware of her own defects, and as perfectly determined that they should not be reproduced in Magdalen. A practical woman, Mary Conway, with her husband's aid, selected the teaching she could not direct, and she made no mistakes. Mr. Conway's more refined intellect bore its share in aiding the progress of Magdalen, and not the least delightful passages in her life were the quaint disputations in which her father loved to engage her upon the subjects of her studies, and she owed much to the stores which at such times he poured out from the resources of a powerful memory, and which he garnished with a curious and pleasant subtlety peculiar to himself. Magdalen had therefore much beyond the ordinary accomplishments when she reached the age of sixteen, and though she had never read a French novel surreptitiously, or privately discussed, with other girls, the probable merits of an Italian master as a lover, she was not otherwise the inferior of the average of young ladies who have been finished out of the home of their parents.

But it happened that though Magdalen had received the usual amount of religious education, as imparted in families where religion is taken somewhat easily — that is to say, though she regularly accompanied her mother to church, had learned the catechism, and was reasonably well up in the history of the Hebrew kings and the voyages of St. Paul — no one had taken the pains

to fence her round with the bulwarks of orthodox Protestantism, or to inspire her with the conviction that Pius the Ninth was the prophesied representative of Antichrist. And this omission of theological accomplishments led to a curious result. For Magdalen, at about the period of life which has been mentioned, was allowed to pay a somewhat prolonged visit to some relations of her mother. They lived in South Wales, and they were Catholics. It was during the time when the Conways were much occupied with the law-struggle which ended so successfully for them, and so injuriously to the Captain who drank boiled rum, and it is possible that the father and mother did not pay such close attention to the state of Magdalen's mind, as disclosed in her letters, as they should have done.

But without any particular effort at her conversion, on the part of the two pretty Catholic girls in the family in which she was sojourning, Magdalen slid quietly and acquiescently into the ways of the Papist household, and though she did not proceed to the step of professing the old creed — let it be interpolated that the Haslops were ladies and gentlemen, and would have taken no spiritual advantage of the unformed nature of a girl — Miss Conway became as much of a Catholic as she could be without doing the only thing which, according to that Church, is of the least use at all in regard to our hereafter. Had she remained in Wales, it is far from improbable that she might have conformed to the religion of her friends, to which disaster would have been added another, for this book would not have been written. But those who had loved her best wearied for her bright eyes and soft hands and merry voice, and they reclaimed her as soon as the furious Captain had

signified that, the decision of law having once gone against him, he would fight no more, and everybody had his free leave to go where Virgil took Dante. Miss Conway came to Naybury nominally a Protestant, but with a great many Catholic influences at work within her, and it may be that the keen and orthodox reader has already had the sagacity to trace some of these in regard to her dealings with the poor, and with herself.

Of Edward Grafton's early attachment to Magdalen, and of its ill-fortune, we have heard. Miss Conway was never for a moment inclined to listen to the suit of the young clergyman, and had never given him the slightest encouragement. His courtship had been nipped in its earliest bud, and Magdalen had had no reason to suppose that he would venture to make any fresh manifestation of his feelings towards her. She had been as much surprised as offended at the outbreak upon which he had presumed that day. But she was older now, by more than two years, than when Edward Grafton had first addressed her, and when she came to review all the circumstances of the case, the beautiful Magdalen began to think that her surprise was somewhat uncalled for. A train of reflections arose which, if it were not favourable to Edward Grafton, was not exactly advantageous to the interest of Ernest Dormer, though Magdalen was unconscious of its tendency.

Into the subtler workings of the heart of Magdalen Conway, under the influences of the incidents of the day, we may obtain a later insight. For the moment we will glance, in a more worldly way than she did, at the outside aspects of her engagement to Mr. Dormer. Magdalen had first met him at her father's table. The Conways usually made a brief visit to London during

the season, and thus kept up many of the acquaintances of their younger days. Mrs. Conway, especially, who liked her own relations, and secretly thought a family party the most pleasant thing in the world, always pressed this visit upon her William, who would perhaps have been content to preserve the family ties by means of correspondence, and who was a little heterodox as to the sacred duties of cousinhood and the like. But when in town he played the courteous lord and bounteous host, and even took pains to vary the affectionate monotony of Mrs. Conway's consanguineous gatherings by inserting guests who could relieve the anecdotes of infantine epigrams and adolescent chicken-pox by something more tolerable to human reason. Mr. Conway had become acquainted, professionally, with a good many members of scientific societies, and he was rather fond of haunting their meetings, and carrying away odd scraps of fact or theory for his private delectation.

One fine night he found himself a constituent of a well-dressed crowd that was rather discontentedly parading the area of Burlington House. A star of the first magnitude was making a speech in the large room on the left, which could not contain a quarter of the persons who were desirous to be able to discomfit other persons at their dinners during the rest of the week, by an early description of the great traveller whose return to England made the sensation of the moment. The room had been crammed by those whose zeal for knowledge or for the reputation thereof had been fiery enough to induce them to dine an hour earlier than usual, and these, packed in dense discomfort, were nevertheless greatly refreshed and consoled by hearing the constant arrival of carriages and the angry voices of many wo-

men, scolding those who had not been able to get them out of their houses in decent time. Active young philosophers swarmed up from the pavement to the window ledges, and obtained occasional glances at the star, and sometimes caught a word of his oratory. But the majority of the disappointed ones walked up and down, and the men lit cigars and formed groups, and when the ladies had delivered themselves of their anger against the impertinent people who had dared to be in time, had sufficiently rebuked the husbands who had failed to procure entrance, and had driven away, the outside meeting became rather pleasant, and to the wise man, who knew that he could read every word of the great traveller's speech comfortably in the *Athenæum* on the following Saturday, the exclusion from the stifling room was not one of the great grievances of his life. Mr. Conway, however, who was undoubtedly a fidget, was very unhappy at having been induced by a friend to linger over their claret at a neighbouring club until his getting into the room was impossible. He tried the door again and again, enduring rebuke from those around it, and he even sprang up with much energy and thrust his head among the legs of the men on the window-ledges, in his desire to behold the man who had beheld the African river. But his exertions were futile, until one of the men whom he had butted, and who had looked down at first in wrath, and then with a gentler feeling, when he saw the white hair and the intellectual face below him, said, kindly,

"If you care about perching here, sir, you shall have my place."

So the first filial office which Ernest Dormer performed for the father of Magdalen, was to heave that

unknown gentleman up to a window sill, that he might crane into the room of the Geographical Society.

"If you were a marrying man, Ernest," said a friend, tendering his cigar-case to Dormer, "I should say that you had done a good thing for yourself."

"Thanks. Yes?"

"Yes. Rich old country swell — only one daughter — an out-and-out beauty. I am sold or otherwise disposed of, or I wouldn't tell you. As she can be no good to me, I'll introduce you."

"I don't seem to care about it," said Ernest. "But I like his look. If he comes down before I have finished my weed, you may."

Auctioneers do not announce sales "by inch of candle" now, so that illustration will be lost on the present generation. But here was Magdalen Conway's destiny flickering on three inches of tobacco. Two of them had vanished, when a rattling storm of applause announced that the great African traveller had finished his manly and modest narrative. Mr. Conway looked round, and the height, nothing to five-and-twenty, but something to nine-and-fifty, gave him pause. Ernest Dormer's strong arm was instantly at his service.

"I can hardly say how much obliged to you I am," said Mr. Conway, as he reached the Burlington *pavé*. "I heard capitally, and I only regret to have deprived you of the same pleasure."

"You can easily make it up to him, my dear Conway," said the friend who had spoken to Ernest. This was Mr. Charles Melbush, a young barrister who knew everybody, and whom everybody liked, and who was thought to be more deficient in the organ of veneration than any gentleman of the day, though that is much to

say in an age of comic literature. He had once met Mr. Conway, in the country, on some quarter-sessions business, and had taken him under gracious protection for the rest of his natural life.

"I am sure I should like to know how, Mr. Melbush," said the older gentleman, smiling.

"Ask him to dinner. He is perfectly respectable, and in fact rather distinguished. When I add that he is a particular friend of mine, my dear Conway, only two things more are necessary. One is that when you ask him, you must ask me, and the other is that you should know his name. Mr. Ernest Dormer — Mr. Conway."

It was all said with such coolness and slowness, that it would have seemed impertinent, but that the tone was a gentleman's, and you could not look at Charles Melbush without liking him, and making up your mind that you did not care what he said to you.

Mr. Conway, who was really grateful for the pleasure which Ernest had allowed him to enjoy, did ask the two men to dinner, at a very early date, and so Magdalen met Dormer. He was placed next her at the feast. As usual, that banquet was largely eaten by relations. Ernest managed to interest her in a little discussion or two on some books and some pictures, in spite of the absorbing theme of the meeting, the story of a frightful adventure of a child of one of the matrons, a boy who had fallen down in the mud, while crossing a street, and who would perhaps have been run over and killed, but for Providence and the fact that no vehicle was in sight.

The acquaintance thus made was kept up, for all parties were pleased. Mr. Conway always retained his

original feeling of gratitude for the little civility which introduced him to Ernest. Mrs. Conway speedily learned to like him, and those who knew her best believed that her regard for Dormer had been finally fixed and consolidated by the extreme sympathy which he showed at a time when an infant niece of Mrs. Conway's had been suffering under one of the complaints of childhood. Dormer seemed to know so much about the symptoms and the proper treatment, that a shrewd lady like Magdalen's mamma could hardly fail to ask how a single young gentleman had acquired so much information on subjects not usually within the province of his order. Ernest must have managed to give a satisfactory explanation, and Mrs. Conway, thenceforth, thought exceedingly well of him. It is often the quarter of an hour which we think most wasted which tells most importantly upon our future.

When the Conways returned to the country, Ernest Dormer received several invitations to visit Naybury. But he always found it impossible to accept any of them, and this was something of a puzzle to the family. They knew that he went elsewhere, and as he had no profession, except that he was understood to be in some way connected with literature, the Conways could not comprehend why he always had to express his great regret that he was once more deprived of the opportunity of seeing Naybury.

But he came at last, and when he was not even invited, beyond his having been often assured that he could never come at a wrong time. He had corresponded with Mr. Conway, who liked writing letters, and thought nothing of giving up a morning to the verification of a quotation which he wished to use

apropos of something in a friend's epistle. He seldom wrote direct to Mrs. Conway, but was too observant of the proprieties, and indeed liked her too well, to omit kind messages, and he always sent some merry message to Magdalen. But it had been a matter of remark in their house that they had not heard from him for a long while, when he walked into the breakfast-parlour, and for the first time visited Magdalen in her own home. His visit was none the less welcome for being unexpected, and he soon found that whatever his object might be, he should have all the advantages of a sincere liking on the part of at least two out of the three who made that pleasant and happy household.

It was very soon seen that he came with an object, and if Mrs. Conway was the first to discover it, the feat of sagacity was not a great one, for Ernest Dormer seemed inclined not only to make no secret of his purpose, but to promote it with somewhat more than the ordinary speed of a first-class matrimonial train. He put himself in the way of being asked questions about himself, and his explanations were so ample and frank that even William Conway smiled knowingly at his wife, when they compared notes. As no hint was given to Magdalen to avoid Mr. Dormer's private society, and as she was not instructed to receive a letter inviting her to visit relations, it might be surmised that the parents saw no reason for interference. So the young people met in the garden before breakfast, and had much chat in the room afterwards, while Mr. Conway inspected his greenhouse, and Mrs. Conway, her own housekeeper, had debate on stores and estimates. They also talked a good deal in the garden, and the

parrot, though he commentated, did not reprove. They rode together, and together inspected the ruins of Naybury Castle, which they found very interesting, and worthy of a long investigation. They did not make any visits together, for Dormer and Magdalen found that among many points of agreement, both detested calls, but Ernest Dormer accompanied Magdalen on some of her missions to the poor, and was seen of the Julls, Widgeons, and Mrs. Faunt. He did not say much to any of these folks. Magdalen, who was disposed to think well of all he did, placed his silence, and his generally waiting outside the cottages, to the account of his good taste — he did not wish her name to be needlessly coupled with his own, especially by a class that is very ready with the broadest of hints and the most solemn of congratulations. That might have been his reason.

Of course, the end of it all was that he was permitted to seek a readily conceded interview with Mr. and Mrs. Conway, and perhaps no young gentleman was ever more agreeably helped along in his declarations and explanations than was Ernest Dormer by these kindly Conways. As for mamma, she nearly took all the work upon herself, and half scolded her husband for putting a few questions to his proposed son-in-law. Ernest Dormer, however, was allowed to state that he was without an income, except a few hundreds which he gained by his pen, but that certain near relations, Mr. and Mrs. Stepney, the latter of whom was sister to his deceased mother, were ready, on his marriage, to transfer to him certain property which had formerly belonged to his parents, and this would enable him to make a settlement on his wife. It is needless to add

that he used extremely becoming and adoring language in speaking to the parents concerning that young lady, or that they thoroughly agreed in all that he was pleased to say in her favour.

The consent of the Conways was given with a willingness which caused private surprise to Ernest. And he was by no means in such a state of ecstasy at the attainment of his suit as to prevent his taking especial note of all that occurred. It is strange, too, he said to himself, as he went into the garden, where he had a not unfounded idea that Miss Conway would happen to come after his interview with her parents — it is strange that there was one thing which they did not say. Magdalen is their idol, and the sunshine of their house, and the one object of all their care, and yet neither of them said that it would be a great sorrow to them to lose her.

And the reason why they had not said this one thing may be supplied by those who recollect the earliest conversation at the Octagon, touching Dormer's marriage. With the usual lack of hesitation evinced by young clubbists in making statements, Mr. Launceston declared that the marriage was broken off on account of a condition with which Ernest afterwards agreed to comply. That was not so — the match was never put into jeopardy on that ground. But the condition was imposed, and Ernest Dormer had said to Milwarden that he did not quite see his way about one stipulation, and Milwarden had said to Dalston that there was a hitch, and Dalston had said to Rydon that there had been a row, and Rydon had said to Alford that the affair had blown up, and Alford had said to Marsden that the parents had thrown Ernest over, and Marsden had said to

Clyde that he had better say nothing, but that it had come near to kicking Ernest out of the house, and Clyde had said to Daimes that Dormer would not show at the club for a long time, and as just then Dormer walked into the club with Latrobe it was perceived that some modification of the story was obviously necessary, so Latrobe was whispered to, and as Latrobe whispered to women only, he told Ernest Dormer what he had heard, and Dormer desired him to deny the whole statement. Which Colonel Latrobe did, with no particular softness of terms, but too much gossip had been spread to allow the tale to be entirely demolished, and it was reduced to the version which Launceston had given Wigram, namely, that things had been squared. It is not every club-fiction that is brought down to such harmless dimensions.

Things had not been squared, however, for they needed no squaring. After the Conways had given their consent to the marriage, and Ernest Dormer had imparted this fact to Magdalen, the parents had come out to the engaged couple, and spoken, with moistened eyes, what all loving parents have felt when delegating a precious charge to the keeping of another.

"This is your home, Ernest," Mrs. Conway had said, holding his hand.

He had accepted the words, at the moment, in the kindest sense, but not literally, and it was not until, in the next private talk with his affianced Magdalen, he had begun to consult her as to the quarter of London in which she would like to live, and had prepared himself to say what would make her decide irrevocably against one particular quarter, that Magdalen made him see that her parents would never part with her.

"Did you not notice what mamma said, dear? This is your home?"

"Yes, dearest. But though I dare say mamma will like to see a good deal of us, we are not to quarter ourselves upon her," he said, smiling.

"But that is exactly what she means, what they both mean. They will never agree to our living anywhere but in this house."

"In this house?" repeated Ernest.

"Yes, dear. Is the idea so dreadful?"

"Dreadful," he said, laughing; "where could we find a better? But I fancy, Magdalen, that you have made a sort of mistake."

"But I never make mistakes, sir. Dear Ernest, you may believe what I tell you. It would break their hearts to think that you would take me away to another home. They have always said that nothing should part us. And, sir, is it not a great thing in you that you have made yourself so acceptable that they not only allow you to take me, but insist on your coming to live with them. Are you not proud of yourself, a little, just a little?"

"Of you, Magdalen, and so proud that I have no room for pride on my own account. But this plan takes me quite by surprise."

"There is plenty of room in the house," said Magdalen, simply; "and I am sure that we shall be allowed — no, be ordered to choose whatever part we like to have, and our ——"

What made Magdalen break off her sentence, and why she did not seem to know how to take it up again, and why she flushed, and appeared vexed, and might have been about to cry, yet might not have been able

to say why, are questions which did not appear to disquiet Ernest, who drew her close to him, and after some moments of eloquent silence, said something which sent that little frown, of which mention has been made, to her fair brow, and then that smile, of which it was ever the harbinger, to her lips.

This was all the squaring that ever was done, and mathematics were never much more agreeably practised.

The story, to which we have had to recur, needs little addition. The period of engagement was not to be a long one, and it was drawing to its end when the banquet at the Octagon was given. The Conways, who had yielded Magdalen to Dormer, were not likely to be distrustful of him in regard to the world's affairs, but the business arrangements were conducted with due detail, and nothing could be more satisfactory than the report which Mr. Conway's solicitor sent down touching his interview with Mr. and Mrs. Stepney, whose expressions of kind hope for their nephew's happiness quite touched the hard old lawyer. He was desirous to convey the impression they had created upon him, but being something inapt at sentimental writing, stated that they could be more easily conceived than described, a burst of eloquence which made Magdalen laugh out with delight.

Ernest Dormer had paid the last visit which he was to make to Naybury, until he should come for his bride. It was during the interval that our story began—it was during the interval that Magdalen received the letter with which she has shut herself up while we have been telling what it was necessary that the reader should know. Why should not Ernest and Magdalen

be happy? He is young, manly, accomplished, kindly. She is beautiful, good, affectionate. Her heart was disengaged, and as for a man's heart, it is an anatomical expression. The world smiles on them, they marry with the approbation of friends, and a delightful home awaits them, one that will be their own in future days. Nevertheless, the letter may not have tended to the promotion of the happiness we hope to see. But girlhood is not altogether reasonable, and girls grow wiser when they are wed.

CHAPTER XI.

Dorcas at Home.

THE Naybury Dorcas Society mustered in unusual force in the school-room at Mrs. Bulliman's house, on the first meeting-night after the lecture of Mr. Yotes, the missionary. The matrons and maidens who composed that association said to one another, when they met in the shops or in the streets, that the interesting details which good Mr. Yotes had given them in respect to the natives of Madagascar would form a very delightful subject for conversation while the needles were at work for the poor. But it had been rumoured that the curate of Saxbury had said something to dear Mrs. Bulliman which might also occupy the consideration of the little assembly. This item in the order of the day was not dwelt upon, out of doors, but every one felt that it had a good deal to do with the handsome attendance of members.

Can it be necessary to inform anybody that Dorcas was a good woman who made clothes for the poor in the days of the apostles, and that in the days of their

successors, the primates and bishops of the Church of England, there are numerous places where good and religious ladies form working clubs for the same excellent purpose, and which clubs meet, in rotation, at the houses of the members. The system is adopted both by church-people and by dissenters, and the motive power is the same in each case, but the proceedings vary. Some Dorcas societies simply meet and work and talk, others are opened by clergy, with solemn religious ceremonial, like the Crystal Palace, (where we saw Blondin, and the female jockeys;) others, again, have no theological rites, but it is understood that the conversation is to be of the kind which is called serious.

Mrs. Bulliman, who was the Grand Mistress of the Dorcas Lodge in Naybury, had sanctioned a sort of compromise. For although she was disposed to be a little despotic with the poor, and although she might be thought to be somewhat too proclamatory of her own beliefs, and of the exceeding ignorance, not to say sinfulness of all who did not share them, Sarah Bulliman was not a bad sort of a woman, and had occasional tendencies to jollity. She really meant exceedingly well, and if everybody else in church and state generally, and in Naybury — and Saxbury — in particular, would only have conformed to her rules and decrees, she would never have had an unkind word for anybody but Roman Catholics. Against the faith and deeds of those unfortunate misbelievers, she regarded it her duty to protest at all times, in season and out of season, and notably the latter, and she had not the faintest hesitation in attributing the Crimean War, the Indian Mutiny, and every other affliction

which has come upon us, to the fatal error of 1829. But, deducting these and a few kindred matters, Mrs. Bulliman was a better woman than a great many who abused her continually, and always accepted her invitations to dinner. In regard to her Dorcas meetings, she behaved with much sense. She gave her ladies very good strong tea, and the accessories were liberally supplied. She had no regular solemnities, but if a clergyman happened to come in (and few clergymen's wives made such tea) and he felt inclined to improve the occasion, there was the little table and the good book, or if he happened to read secular composition with any decency, the last volume of missionary research, or the last memoir of some pious soldier, was sure to be at hand, and the clerical man was invited to display his elocution. On the whole, however, though the fact was never owned, the Dorcasians were best pleased when the clergy took tea at home, and inflicted their reading upon their own families.

This evening it was matter of special hope — to say the least — that no clerical man would come. For though the ladies of Naybury were quite as shrewd as the ladies of London or any other place where folks think, like Job's friends, that they alone are The people and that wisdom shall die with them, and though they knew perfectly well that a clergyman is too conscientious to recoil from the painful duty of hearing, or pointing out the errors of a brother priest, the sacrifice can be much more satisfactorily dissected without the aid of a superintending flamen. Freedom of discussion is much checked when a speaker has to recollect the presence of a spiritual chief. And though the matrons of Naybury were brave, and unaccustomed

to yield any slavish deference to their clerical men, and especially treated curates with familiarity, the young ladies were very reserved in their expressions of opinion when an unmarried clergyman was present. In the middle of Devizes is a memorial of a female who came to grief for telling a lie, but in every town is the un-reared but enduring memorial of some girl who has come to grief by an unguarded utterance of truth. In Naybury itself there was a fearful legend of a thoughtless young lady who was engaged to a lawyer, and who was cruelly discarded for anticipating the time at which she could with impunity have hazarded her flippant allegation that all lawyers were cheats. The name of Minnie Welton, and the home in which she still lived — an old maid — were warnings at least as effective as the profane stone of Devizes.

Mr. Bulliman happened to be the owner of his house, and the nominal head of the family, and theoretically he had of course the right to enter any room in his own mansion, and converse with the guests who assembled under his roof. But a Tory who was a member of the Privy Council would as soon have thought of insisting on his right to sit down with a Liberal Cabinet and advise her Majesty. Once, at a meeting near Christmas time, Mr. Bulliman had ventured to send in a note, humbly representing to his wife that the snow was on the ground, and that if some hot negus would be acceptable to the ladies before they departed, he should be only too much honoured in brewing it, but the verbal answer was so discouraging that Mr. Bulliman took himself away to a card party (he was carnal) and was heard of no more for hours. But it shall be recorded to Mrs. Bulli-

man's honour, that though she conscientiously resisted this attempt at the beginning of an encroachment, she did but wait to ascertain that her husband was quite out of the way, and then she ordered up an ample supply of the comfortable beverage which he had suggested, using for the manufacture a very high class of port, for the purchase of which she had, on religious principles, severely reprehended the epicurean Bulliman.

One would not insult the Dorcas Association of Naybury by comparing it to a certain assembly which meets at Westminster, but in one respect an irreverent person (only there were no irreverent Dorcasians) might have been reminded of certain nights with the Speaker. When it has been arranged that some public business shall be taken first, and afterwards a personal matter, the extreme flatness of the earlier debate is a delightful contrast to the point of the second, and the bored but conscientious attention given to the country's affairs is an admirable foil to the sudden waking up of the House, when the Accuser, with a glistening eye, but a look of sincere grief, begins to regret, in his best manner, the painful necessity of entering into a damaging detail.

The tea-cups had disappeared, the circle, with its outlying groups, had been formed, and the various bags in which the work had been sent to Mrs. Bulliman's house lay at the feet of their respective owners. And the sight was a pretty and pleasant one, and the hands were kindly engaged. Also the little incidents were pleasing, as when a puzzled young lady held out a very tiny garment to her neighbour, and implored advice as to what she was to do to it—of course it

had been cut out for her — or when a couple of matrons, observing the younger creatures, exchanged a whisper and a smile, the latter rather complacent than mirthful. Then came what was equivalent to Mr. Lefevre's command that the clerk do now proceed to read the orders of the day.

"Phœbe," said Mrs. Bulliman to her daughter, "what did dear Mr. Yotes say the poor natives themselves call Madagascar? — the word escapes me constantly."

"Madecasse, mamma."

"Yes, that is it. We see how the name has been corrupted by Europeans. Would that were the only corruption they have spread there."

"Ah, indeed," said somebody, sighing.

"He paid, I thought, quite as many compliments to the French missionaries as were necessary," said Mrs. Cutcheon, a very grim-looking Dorcas, whose face did not convey the impression that many compliments had been paid to her.

"It was the mistake in his lecture, my dear," said Mrs. Bulliman, "and I told him so before Mr. Watkinson and the committee."

"And what did he say?"

"He said, I thought very weakly, that he had himself witnessed the efforts of the French, and their devotion, and that his account would have been incomplete if he had not done them justice."

"But I like him for that," said Miss Fanny Buxton, incautiously.

"I grieve to hear you say so, Fanny," said Mrs. Bulliman.

"But is it not right," asked Fanny, her pretty

face colouring, but her courage holding up, "to bear truthful witness for those who are doing their best?"

"Their best, Fanny?" said Mrs. Bulliman, sternly rending a great piece of calico in twain. "Your excellent mother is not here to be pained by so thoughtless an expression. Their best, — when they are labouring to spread their own false religion among these poor islanders!"

But that worldly little Fanny was not quite crushed.

"Surely, Mrs. Bulliman, the Catholic religion, with all its errors, must be better than the idolatry of the natives."

"The Roman Catholic religion, Fanny," said Mrs. Bulliman, who had the bump of locality, "is itself idolatry, and fearful is the responsibility of those who countenance any effort to spread it. I think, my dear," she added, in a very superior manner, "that you are imperfectly informed on a vital question, and perhaps you would do well to talk it over with dear Phœbe and dear Sophia, before you express any further opinion on the subject."

Whether Fanny Buxton were crushed by the argument or not, it is certain that she felt appalled at the invitation to combat with the two gaunt champions of the faith, and she gladly availed herself of a gusset difficulty to turn to a neighbour.

"Did you hear what was collected, Mrs. Bulliman?" asked Mrs. Turner, good-naturedly. She did not care a farthing, but she wanted to take the Protestant matron off the poor little girl.

"I am almost ashamed to say. Perhaps, as I told Mr. Yotes, some may have held their hands in dis-

pleasure at his uncalled-for praises of the Roman Catholic emissaries. I felt something of that inclination, but I suppressed it because I thought that my example might be misconstrued."

"But you have not said how much."

"Guess, my dear."

"Chervil said that there were a hundred people in the room."

"He had better have been listening than counting, and then perhaps he would have been inclined to behave more liberally than he did. I saw him put in sixpence."

"The new plate-glass window and architectural front to his shop cost him seventy pounds," said Mrs. Gilbert, and she said it in so perfectly unemphasised a way that no one could tell whether she meant that poor Mr. Chervil, having been put to heavy expenses, could not just now afford much charity, or whether it would have been better for wicked Mr. Chervil to consider the claims of the heathen before wasting his substance on riotous architecture.

"Chervil makes professions," said Mrs. Bulliman, "but I prefer acts. It is painful to see that he is anything but sincere. Few chemists are."

"I fear so," said Mrs. Mainwaring. Yet that lady had no particular cause to complain of chemical insincerity, for this very Mr. Chervil had distinctly told her, two days before, that it was of no use his selling her anodynes for neuralgia, inasmuch as she had no neuralgia at all, but toothache, for her teeth were old and ought to be stopped.

"It is sad, but it is true," said Mrs. Bulliman.

"They get reading those dreadful German writers, my

dear, and they become materialists, — I had better say infidels."

"I do not think that Mr. Chervil has reached that awful stage," said Mrs. Turner.

"We all hope not," said Mrs. Bulliman. "But I heard him, myself, in explaining something in geology to Mrs. De Gully — who might do better than encourage a tradesman to fancy himself a philosopher — I heard him use the words 'the Mosaic account of the Deluge.' When I hear that sneer, I know that all is over, and that it is only a question of prudence whether a man will or will not deny all revelation and the existence of a Deity."

"No doubt," said Mrs. Mainwaring, who was the most literal of believers, and took the Lowther Arcade view of Noah's Ark.

"But I have not told you the amount of the collection for the Madagascan mission," said the hostess. "I asked you to guess, my dear," she added, to Mrs. Turner, for Mrs. Bulliman had no notion of letting her requests be regarded as other than commands.

"A hundred people? Let me see," said Mrs. Turner. "I know I gave half a crown," she said, smiling, and without the slightest intention of making proclamation of liberality — it was merely to help her on while she considered.

"I do not think that any one is called upon to say what she might feel able or inclined to put into the plate," said Mrs. Cutcheon, severely.

"Certainly not," said two or three of the elder ladies at once, while two or three of the younger ones seemed for the moment to bestow extra diligence on their work.

"I did not mean it in that sense," said Mrs. Turner, "and I am sure it is nothing to make a merit of, for Mr. Yotes's heart-rending stories about those poor little children that were murdered made me cry to that degree that I hardly knew what I did, and I only wanted to get home, and thank God that my own dear ones were all safe in bed."

"My children were with me," said Mrs. Gilbert, emitting the words with no more emphasis than is in the sound of falling water. Did she mean that she sat happy with her own dear ones beside her, or that Mrs. Turner ought to have brought her children to improve their hearts and dreams by a lecture on the slaughtered little heathen? This power of virtuous *double entendre* was of great value to Mrs. Gilbert, for she never got into a quarrel, though she always left her friends at liberty to torment themselves with the thought that she had given them a severe castigation.

"I would not have had mine there on any account," said Mrs. Turner. "Other people can do as they please; but I do not choose to torment my little ones with dreadful tales, enough to give them the nightmare."

"Of course other people can do as they please," said Mrs. Bulliman, recognising rebel utterances. "You need not tell us that, my dear. Another consideration, and one which is much more to the purpose is, whether a parent is justified in depriving a child of the privilege of knowing the state of the heathen, and of becoming aware, early, that the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty."

Mrs. Turner very seldom fought about anything else, but she was always ready to give battle for her

own children, or for anybody else's, and she would not be put down even by a text. She replied with some energy that she had not much belief in the tenderness of parents who took children where they were made miserable. While Mrs. Gilbert was preparing one of her amphisbænic sentences, Mrs. Bulliman said, loftily,

"We have not been acquainted long enough, Mrs. Turner, for you to be aware that from the earliest age my girls, Phœbe and Sophia, have attended every missionary meeting which has been held in our neighbourhood; and I dare say that my Phœbe remembers to this day the very severe chastisement which I felt obliged to bestow upon her, at nine years old, for ridiculing a pious and worthy man who had delivered a most interesting lecture, but whose red cotton pocket handkerchief was full of holes. I do not suppose that you would imply that I am deficient in tenderness?"

"Lor, my dear, of course not," said Mrs. Turner; and it may be feared, from the exclamation, that though in a worldly sense she might be goodhearted, she was not up to the Bulliman mark. "But there are pleasanter things to tell children than about other children having their legs chopped off, poor dears. I hope it isn't true."

This most objectionable sentiment drew a volley of surprise from all corners.

"You wish to believe, my dear Mrs. Turner, that Mr. Yotes stood up before us, and told deliberate falsehoods?" said Phœbe Bulliman, who perhaps thought that as her own early sin had been laid bare in the sight of the meeting, she was entitled to go in for a little self-assertion.

"Well," said Mrs. Turner, laughing, "I should much prefer that one man told some fibs to interest us than that all those poor little children had been put to a cruel death. He said that it was a good while ago, and we know that it must have been a long way off. Let us hope that it isn't true."

"Without meaning any offence, dear Mrs. Turner," said the hostess, "I speak as a Christian mother, and but that I know the principles of my own girls are too well rooted and grounded to be shaken, I really could not allow them to remain in the room."

"*My* leaving it seems the proper course," said Mrs. Turner, "if good manners are forgotten for the sake of an itinerant lecturer with no lobes to his ears. I hope the collection was about twopence halfpenny over what I was foolish enough to give, and I wish you all a very good evening."

And she left the room; and Mrs. Bulliman noticed that Fanny Buxton rose and opened the door for her. Perhaps two or three others in that meeting were privately on the side of the warm-hearted Mrs. Turner, though her want of meekness was reprehensible, and her reference to Mr. Yotes's want of lobes scarcely bore upon the argument.

"An eminent divine has said that temper is nine-tenths of Christianity," said Mrs. Gilbert, but whether she was hitting at the departed lady, or the lady of the house, no one could tell. The latter had been too much astonished, at such a sudden plucking up of spirit on the part of a very goodnatured little woman, to be ready with a comment, and now was justly offended that any one else should take the duty out of her hands.

"The rudeness is to *me*. If you please, we will

say no more about it. But perhaps, Fanny, you will quite close the door you seemed so glad to have the honour of opening."

Fanny Buxton obeyed, and made no reply; but it is to be feared that the young lady, while she felt that it was not exactly her place to give fight, privately despised the matronhood for their tameness, and thought that if she were only a married girl — but that thought treacherously led her away to fresh fields and pastures new. And when she got back to Dorcas, another topic was in hand.

"His exact expression," Phœbe was saying. "I am accustomed to take notice of words, and I wrote his down when we got home."

"Are we not making rather too much of what was perhaps only a very foolish joke?" said Mrs. Fanshaw, a lady-like person, who had not cared to interfere in the scene with Mrs. Turner, but who was inclined in her mild way to discourage the Inquisition.

"Edward Grafton is not in the habit of joking," said Sophia Bulliman, and it was true, as regarded herself, and she had been aggrieved at the young clergyman's amiable indisposition to favour her own rather grim witticisms.

"Repeat, dear Phœbe," said her mother, "the lines of Cowper on the subject of a clergyman who is given to jesting."

The well-drilled Phœbe was ready at call, and recited, with very good emphasis,

"Direct me to a quip,
Or merry turn in all Paul ever wrote,
And I consent you take it for your text,
Your only one till sides and benches fail.
No, he was serious in a serious cause."

"Well remembered, dear child," said Mrs. Fanshaw, kindly, to Phœbe, who was about a foot taller than herself, and who looked years older than the fair little matron. "But I do not think that there is much in common between Mr. Edward Grafton and Saint Paul." She used the word saint with distinctness, as it was not much in use with the Bulliman section of the church.

"I should say not," said Mrs. Cutcheon, "if Edward Grafton speaks in that way of missionaries."

"A Home Mission might not be altogether out of place at Saxbury," said Miss Sophia, and her wit was received with smiles in several quarters.

"It becomes a question," said Mrs. Mainwaring, "whether dear Mrs. Bulliman is not called upon to take some serious notice of such a speech. It cannot be looked at as the mere flippancy of a young man; flippancy is not Mr. Grafton's habit; and it was addressed to a lady whose views were well known to him. Setting aside the wickedness, I think the offensiveness of the remark was excessive, and if it is not uncharitable to say so, I believe it was not made without a reason."

"I have no false charity, I hope," said Mrs. Cutcheon.

"Nor much true," thought that naughty little Fanny Buxton; but, of course, held her peace.

"And," continued the lady, "I cannot set aside the wickedness, which seems to me the gravest part of the offence. I have never heard anything so shocking in all my life. To think that such a man has the care of human souls, and will one day succeed to the Rectory."

"We are not so certain about that," said Mrs. Mainwaring.

Several ladies looked up from their work, but three or four kept at it steadily, having some inkling of what might be coming out, but not being desirous to be compromised in the spread of scandal. There was good listening going on just then in Dorcas.

"The Rectory is old Mr. Grafton's own," said Mrs. Gilbert, safe as usual.

"At present," said Mrs. Mainwaring, closing her lips tightly. For she had now gone as far as she meant to go, unless somebody else went with her. In provincial society it is necessary to be guarded; in London we have no scruple about alienating friends, because a fresh supply is always ready in the next drawing-room we visit.

"I am aware of your meaning," said Mrs. Bulliman, who could afford to despise politic considerations. "But I have reason to think that you are mistaken. You once hinted something of the kind, and I inquired of Mr. Bulliman, who was solicitor to Mr. Grafton, and knows his affairs. There is no ground for your belief."

"I did not know that I had expressed any," said Mrs. Mainwaring, by no means pleased that the entire charge, whatever it was, should be fastened upon herself. "I merely said — and I wish notice to be taken that I merely said — that we could not be certain of young Mr. Grafton's succession, though the Rectory is his father's."

"We can be certain of nothing in this world," said Mrs. Cutcheon; "but I do not suppose that was what Mrs. Mainwaring meant."

"Mrs. Mainwaring has too much Christian courage to shelter herself under a subterfuge," said Mrs. Bulliman. But this lady had worldly wisdom, and knew which of her subjects she could safely oppress. Mrs. Mainwaring was not one of them; she was rich, and could therefore, as we have seen, afford to be stingy, and she knew an archdeacon, and some of the neighbouring gentry. Mrs. Bulliman, having asserted her prerogative, extended clemency, and added,

"It had been rumoured that old Mr. Grafton was in debt. I am informed by Mr. Bulliman that such is not the case, and therefore Mrs. Cutcheon is right in her sad surmise that a person like Edward may one day take upon himself the charge of poor Saxbury. Let us hope that before that time comes he may be awakened."

"And although a solicitor is proverbially cautious, and I believe is forbidden to tell anything of a client's business," said Mrs. Gilbert, "we may be sure that he would answer frankly to his wife." A remark which, of course, while highly complimentary, apprised the meeting that in all probability Mr. Bulliman had done nothing of the kind. Which his wife perfectly understood, and said,

"I presume that when I make a statement on authority, you will believe that I know what I am talking about. And let the future be what it may, Edward Grafton is now the curate at Saxbury, and officiates regularly. I am sorry to say that another painful thing has come to me in regard to that young man; but this, of course, must not be repeated out of this room." And she looked at Fanny Buxton, not that Mrs. Bulliman thought Fanny more likely to be

garrulous than anybody else, but because she was still under martial law, and was to be reminded of the fact.

"A person whom I do not mean to name, but a serious person, was in Saxbury church at the last evening lecture, which was on the evening of the day when we met young Grafton. The mode in which he read the service, and above all the way in which he preached, showed that he was labouring under excitement."

The slang in Dorcas is not that of the Octagon club, but it is just as well understood, and there was sensation.

"That is not new," said Mrs. Cutcheon. "He had that fatal tendency at college, and some of us know what occurred once — at least we know only of one occurrence — at Mrs. Conway's, although for reasons which are perfectly comprehensible, she made a great mystery of it, and I fear went so far as to deny it upon one occasion." And again that unfortunate Fanny Buxton was looked at by a severe matron. There was good spirit in that little maiden.

"Mrs. Cutcheon looks at me, as if I ought to speak," said Fanny, "because she means, I suppose, that the denial took place in my hearing. I quite remember what was said, and that Mrs. Conway only checked what was a very impertinent inquiry." And Fanny, in her turn, looked antagonistic, for she adored Mrs. Conway, who had once helped her, in the nicest way, out of a girl's indiscretion, and given her such a kind and hearty scolding, as had endeared her to Fanny for life. Nobody felt inclined to venture upon Mrs. Conway's pretty little champion just then.

Mrs. Bulliman was not unjust.
"If you mean by Mrs. Conway's reasons," she said, "that she had any thought of Edward Grafton and Magdalen, there is nothing in it. They never would hear of him. That is certain, I assure you, Mrs. Cutcheon."

"I am glad to hear it, for Miss Conway's sake."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Mainwaring, "the best construction we can put upon his wicked speech to Mrs. Bulliman is that the same cause was in operation."

"It was early in the afternoon," said Phoebe.

"There was nothing of the kind," said Sophia.

"He spoke quite collectedly about Mr. Yotes's lecture."

"And explained that he had not known of it."

"And inquired who Mr. Yotes was."

"And mentioned the exact hour of dinner at the Rectory."

"And his father's reluctance to alter it."

So, in alternate strains, testified the Misses Bulliman. How delightful to be a young clergyman, whose smallest words are caught up and remembered, to jot and tittle, by young ladies, even if they be externally hard-favoured.

"And the evening lecture is always before dinner," said Mrs. Fanshaw.

"I am sorry to say that there are other places besides his father's dining-room," said Mrs. Mainwaring, "where Edward might indulge his unhappy habit, for I fear we must call it so, and that those places are known to Mr. Grafton is also too certain. He very frequently visits the Salvington Arms."

"He has a horse there," said Fanny Buxton, "and

it is there because it is ill, and Saxbury is too far for Mr. Enery, the veterinary surgeon, to see it so often there as Mr. Grafton wishes."

"You seem very well informed about this poor young man's affairs, Miss Buxton," said Mrs. Mainwaring.

"I heard this from my brother," said Fanny, gently.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Cutcheon, "a horse is a very good excuse for a visit to a tavern."

Fanny knew, but did not like to say, that the Salvington Arms was not a tavern, but a most respectable hotel, and also that the stabling was a long way from the house, and was approached by a separate entrance. She had been taken there by her brother to see a wonderful spotted pony belonging to a travelling circus, but, worldly little creature as she was, she knew better than to bring a circus pony into Dorcas.

"Old Mr. Grafton was never suspected of that sin," said Mrs. Gilbert, for a second just departing a shade from her colourless delivery to put a little force in her last word but one.

"No," said Mrs. Bulliman, "never. Another sin would cast that out, his wicked pride, though, speaking in a worldly sense, it is hard to say what he has to be proud of."

"Not his sermons," said Mrs. Mainwaring, "for he does not preach twenty times from Christmas to Christmas, and when he does, I am told that his discourses are evidently out of some old book."

"Not of the state of his parish," said Mrs. Cutcheon, "for to say nothing of spiritual blindness, the morals of Saxbury — however, as there are young persons

here we need not go into that — but we judge the shepherd by the sheep.”

“Nor of his son and destined successor,” said Mrs. Bulliman; “and how dreadful must be the responsibility of a parent who has brought up a son in that manner, and, with what is before his eyes, intends to commit a parish to the charge of such a young man.”

“I do not believe Edward Grafton to be utterly bad at heart,” said Phœbe. “I need not say, I hope, that I know we all are that, but I mean in the ordinary sense, and I think that if he were providentially directed in marriage, he might be reclaimed.”

It was no secret to two or three of grim Phœbe’s friends that it was not her fault that Edward had never deciphered her name on the direction in question, but having renounced hope, she could yet speak without bitterness. There is some good in all of us.

“Phœbe,” said Mrs. Bulliman, “you have been too well taught in serious things to countenance the doctrine that a Christian woman may run the fearful risk of marriage with one who is no Christian, in the hope of converting him, but as all our friends do not know you so well as your parents, it is right for you to observe that you spoke only in the language of the world.”

“Certainly, mamma,” said Phœbe, rather sulkily. She had intended to be magnanimous, and suddenly found herself receiving, morally, one of the whippings of which, physically, she had in early life not been without experience. And she saw Fanny Buxton’s eyes twinkle — they had a way of twinkling, and it was very pleasant to behold, if she happened to be pleased with the person at whom the phenomenon was

exhibited. Phoebe, however, did not like it, but could hardly make it the subject of remonstrance.

"And speaking of Mrs. Conway," said Mrs. Mainwaring, "it is sad that what she can see in one person, she is blind to in the case of another. I am sure I hope that this marriage of Magdalen's will be happy, but it is made in the face of every kind of warning."

"The intended bridegroom is of the world, worldly," said Mrs. Bulliman, "and saying that, enough is said. But merely in that point of view, I believe that the match is what is called a good one, and perhaps Mrs. Conway will not be sorry to get such a girl settled, and to be released from the trying responsibility which her mother must now suffer. I am afraid, however, to trust myself to think of the future that is in store for Magdalen Conway."

"She is one of the sweetest girls in the world," exclaimed Fanny Buxton, "and she deserves the best husband ever created."

"You mean, Miss Buxton, that she is apparently good tempered. I assure you that you will some day bitterly regret the habit of speaking with unguardedness and exaggeration. Do let me beg of you to subdue an impetuous spirit, too, too sadly in need of correction. I see that I anger you, my dear, but that only convinces me the more that it is my duty to caution you as I should do one of my own children."

"I assure you, Mrs. Bulliman, that you do not know what a good girl Magdalen Conway is, and I do."

"You must not speak so to me, my dear Fanny," said Mrs. Bulliman, with calm dignity. "I do not disapprove of your zeal for one whom you consider your friend, though I wish that you selected friends more

likely to do you good for this world and the next. But let me ask you — or rather do you ask yourself — whether it is consistent with the truth which you have been taught, to profess such admiration for a young person without any religious principles, who has scarcely escaped, if she has escaped, the contamination of the Roman Catholic church.”

Fanny Buxton received this adjuration with composure, but thought it best to abstain from any direct reply.

“I think,” she said, rising, “that I could make you believe better things of Magdalen, but we will have a quiet talk all to ourselves some day. I promised mamma that I would be home early, so I will say good evening.”

But the little rebel said something very unlike good evening as she went into the bed-room to put on her bonnet, and she did not give at all a respectful look at the hard portrait of her hostess which hung over a shelf of works issued by the Religious Tract Society.

“I am sorry Mrs. Buxton permits that intimacy,” said the original of the portrait. “I have remonstrated in vain. But I hoped that by coming among us Fanny might gradually be weaned from the association. Do you try to see as much of her as you can, my dear girls?”

“I am sure I did, mamma,” said Sophia, “but her unwillingness to be much with us was so marked that it was useless to persevere.”

“It was not my intention to mention it,” said Phoebe, “but finding that she would not listen, I wrote her several long letters of affectionate advice to seek other friendships.”

"We have done our duty," said Mrs. Bulliman, "and we can only hope. The marriage will remove Magdalen Conway from Naybury, and the evil will therefore be checked to a great extent."

"Not at all," said Mrs. Cutcheon. "The young couple are to live with the parents. I know that, for Willis has prepared a plan for some alterations in the house, and as he is no great draughtsman, he got Ebenezer Smith to make the drawings. Ebenezer, you know, lodges with one of my husband's clerks, who told my son Robert."

"I did not know that," said Mrs. Mainwaring, "but it is just like the Conways, who make an idol of their daughter, and deny themselves the gratification of no whim. One would have thought that they knew how such arrangements always end."

"But," said Mrs. Bulliman, who would not pretend to have known what really was news to her, "it does not prove that because alterations are made in the house, they are for the sake of Magdalen and Mr. Dormer."

"I assure you," said Mrs. Cutcheon, "that it is as I tell you. The new rooms are marked in the plan with the names of the Dormers, and Robert repeated with a boy's delight a foolish joke of Mr. Conway's, who had insisted on calling the bed-room the Dormertory."

"Well, I am sorry to hear it. In a Christian family, of course, relatives might gather in a spirit that would prevent what we are too sure must happen at the Conways. Mr. Dormer I have seen. We met at one of the cottages of my poor, where Miss Conway thinks it proper and respectful to me to visit also, al-

though she was offered an allotment of paupers whom she could have visited without interfering with any one."

"I hope that she does not give them Popish tracts," said Mrs. Cutcheon.

"If I could trace such an act to her," said Mrs. Bulliman, "my course would be very plain, but I learn from the poor, whom I have severely questioned, that she never talks to them on religion at all. That is sad enough, but it is better than her doing active mischief. I was saying, however, that I met Mr. Dormer, and Miss Conway could not help introducing us. His manners are what is called very agreeable, that is, of course, he does not care sufficiently about anything to be in earnest, and he made some very light minded remarks about the business I was engaged in. He is not the kind of person who will submit to the rule of a mother-in-law."

"Besides," said Mrs. Mainwaring, "what is the use of the Conways giving out that the man is rich, and then taking him into their house? Does a rich man, with a position, accept lodgings in that way? Depend upon it we shall hear the true story one of these days, and find that the Conways have been imposed upon by a penniless adventurer."

"I do not think that Mrs. Conway is a person to be imposed upon, do you, Mrs. Cutcheon?" said Mrs. Fanshaw, very sweetly. It would be harsh to suppose that she addressed that lady except accidentally, or that mild Mrs. Fanshaw remembered a little story about some hay which Mr. Cutcheon had sought to obtain at a very low price from the Londoners, and had not succeeded, owing to the shrewdness of Mary

Conway. The story had rather pleased Naybury, whose ratepayers had once or twice had to smart in consequence of some Cutcheon cleverness.

"I know very little about her, Mrs. Fanshaw, and I am not very anxious to improve our acquaintance," was the tart reply. "I am not one of those who are ready to run into the arms of every new comer."

Now Mrs. Fanshaw was popular, and though sufficiently of a Christian to be allowed to attend the Dorcas meetings, had, not so very long ago, lived in London society, and still preserved the London habit of easily thawing to new acquaintances. Mrs. Cutcheon demanded a great deal of information about people before she would venture to discuss with them, at all freely, the probability of fine weather, and the character of a view from a window. Pretty Mrs. Fanshaw had been seen, wooed, and wed — and wed to a very good fellow — in less time than Mrs. Cutcheon had taken to inquire into the vices of the last housemaid she had engaged, and who, by the way, let in a lover and another burglar, to the detriment of the Cutcheon plate-chest.

"You would like Mrs. Conway, if she would allow you to know her," said Mrs. Fanshaw, smiling down the other's rudeness, and then explaining away her own. "I mean, if you became intimate enough really to know her, of course."

And Mrs. Bulliman knew better than to do more than turn a deaf ear to the remark. It will be seen that though a despot, her despotism, like that of Louis XIV., was tempered by epigrams.

"We were speaking on another subject," she said, "and I suppose that I ought to mention to dear friends

what I thought of doing, not that I wish anyone to be responsible for what I do, or to consider herself mixed up in it, if more afraid than anyone ought to be of giving offence to man. I think Edward Grafton's language to me was so awful in itself, and so much more awful coming from a Christian minister, that it is my duty to set his sin before his eyes, and possibly before the eyes of his father and mother. I shall therefore go over to Saxbury, and I hope I may be able to report that he has given signs of repentance. If he does not give these, painful as it may be, I shall not shrink from an interview with the Bishop."

If that right reverend and most kindhearted and amiable prelate had only known what was in store for him, his lordship would at once have decided on the continental tour to which his wife and daughters were affectionately urging him, but the Anglican hierarch (with an exception or two) is unfortunately without supernatural powers.

Whatever check the head of the Dorcas Association might have encountered in the course of the sitting was now forgotten. In this daring undertaking the society recognised the spirit of its head, and from nearly all her friends — Mrs. Fanshaw was not observed to join — Mrs. Bulliman received the assurance that she was about to take the right line, and according to their natures the Dorcasians in their little speeches appealed more or less freely to a certain influence by which all human actions should be guided, but to which it is not so necessary to make more reference here than will show upon what high grounds Edward Grafton was to be taken to task for wishing that all missionaries were eaten. Be it added, in justice to the Dorcas Associa-

tion, that while all this discussion proceeded, the needles went hard and fast for the benefit of the legitimate babies of Naybury pauperism, and in justice to Mrs. Bulliman, that she did not allow the party to separate until all had partaken of a nice little early supper, prefaced by grace from Phœbe, and ended by grace from Sophia. The House of Commons, to which we tremblingly likened — or refused to liken, the house of Dorcas, is only half as mindful of its religious duties.

CHAPTER XII.

The Rectory.

WHILE such preparation was being made for the assault upon the Rectory, the menaced persons were seated at the well-served table of the Reverend Theodore Grafton.

The head of the household was a clergyman of imposing presence. It has been said by those who loved him not that he was proud, but it would have been difficult for a man so constructed to have avoided the appearance of pride. Tall, large, strong, but not with clumsy strength, the Rector of Saxbury had been in youth one of the most splendid fellows at Oxford, and in advanced age he was the model of what a bishop should be in days when the church demands princes of the fighting sort. He had a fine head, and very masculine features, upon which, though not often, a frown very much akin to a scowl would gather, at which times it was best for the chidden to be silent, except when commanded to excuse themselves. The hair was well preserved, but streaked with grey, almost

the only sign of advancing age, for the eyes were full of light, and though the lines about the mouth had deepened, that effect seemed to have resulted from a habit of setting the face hard, and the bold forehead was unwrinkled. Mr. Grafton's hands were white, but powerful, and they had done work in field and on river, and perhaps in fray, when he was at college. The Rector's voice was exceedingly good, and had been cultivated, and it was a voice which, in the old days, would have rang out proud defiance to king or mob, or would have nobly led the vows of a pious army before the slaughter of the heathen. But it was subdued and modulated in society, with perhaps more art than should be detected, though the effect was so agreeable that one could not quarrel with the means. Mr. Grafton never appeared to be speaking more loudly than others, but at the most hilarious feast he had but to speak to be heard, and one seemed the better for having listened to the notes of that fine organ. His courtesy was great, and what would, in most men, have been deemed somewhat too studied, but it had become a habit with the Rector. His deference to women charmed them, for it was not the mock homage which implies their helplessness of intellect, but the respectful attention which they used to receive from the old school—a very good school in more respects than the new will allow, while muttering its indiscretions to fast young ladies. The Rector, in brief, looked a man who had got himself very well in hand, it might be for a special purpose, but who was quite capable of letting himself go, on provocation, and then, perhaps, might go over all and sundry who got in his way.

The party, in addition to the Rector, consisted of

Mrs. Grafton, the curate, and Mr. Abbott, a lawyer, whose business was chiefly clerical, and who had come over from the cathedral town, where he had been discharging the duties of a pleasant and lucrative office connected with the church and her dowry. He lived in London. Mr. Abbott was a good-looking, gentlemanly man, of middle age, full of information of all kinds, and excessively genial, as it hath been observed that attorneys who have dealings with the clergy usually become, a fact in zoology which has not been satisfactorily explained.

Mrs. Grafton had been a beauty, but of the type which fades very soon, unless the wearer be very prosperous and content, or have a very cold nature which defies trouble and sorrow. Neither of these conditions existed in the case of Mrs. Grafton, who had suffered, and whose delicate features had lost all their charm, except that of gentleness. But she did not play the martyr. Had she wished to do so, it would have been hard work to sustain any continuous melancholy in the presence of the Rector, who would not, probably, have been very tolerant of skeletons at his table or hearth. But Mrs. Grafton had taken her troubles like a good woman, and was always ready to acknowledge the comforts by which they had been in some sort balanced. If she were an unappreciated woman — most women have a harmless trick of believing that they are not quite understood, and the belief is strongest in the simplest of them — Mrs. Grafton never told anybody that it was so. That she was not a happy woman any person could discover who saw her when she imagined herself unobserved; but in society she was kindly, and reasonably cheerful.

Whether she loved as much as she must have admired her splendid husband might be matter of opinion; but no one who saw her looks at Edward Grafton, or caught the motherly undertone of confidence and affection, could doubt her adoration for the young curate of Saxbury.

The entire party seemed on very good terms, and the Rector was just recommending to the notice of the London lawyer some exceedingly fine port, with which the gentleman had, on previous occasions, made fortunate acquaintance.

"Edward passes the bottle, Abbott, and awaits the revolution of the claret-jug; but you and I know better things."

"But he is quite right," said Mr. Abbott, laughing pleasantly — he had a cheery laugh, not at all like the noises emitted by some of his profession, and which seem echoes of the grunts of their clients over unrighteous bills. "Quite right, Mr. Grafton. He knows that there will be no port in a few years, except here and there a bottle for a Rothschild, or an American who has struck oil. So he is not training himself to a luxury which will be forbidden to the *post nati*."

"You remind me of Blackstone, my dear Abbott," said the Rector — a reading man — "if you do not consider that a bad compliment. He gives the most admirable reasons for the most absurd things in law and the constitution. Not, my dear Edward," he added, courteously, to his son, "that your preferring claret to port is absurd, of course. But I think you will admit that our friend has provided you with a reason not strictly within your purview."

"I shall use it, in future, though," said Edward; "it sounds so much better than the real one."

"*Fumus gloria mundi*, perhaps," said the lawyer, "with Sir Bulwer Lytton's gloss on the saying?"

"That is it," said his father. "I never smoked in my life, but each age has its own manners, or want of manners."

Mr. Abbott's look could not be understood by Edward Grafton — but his mother had a glimpse of its meaning, and the Rector looked straight before him, and at his wife. Inside his mind Mr. Abbott said,

"Why before *us*?"

But we do not say everything that we think, or the Last Man would very soon be called upon for his immortal address to the Sun, and Mr. Abbott replied,

"I smoke sometimes, and the Bishop of Pembroke smokes every day. But I do not know that it is worth while acquiring the habit when one has done without it so long as you have done, Mr. Grafton."

Mr. Abbott considered the last words due to himself, and then he praised the Rector's port.

"I wish you would take a glass or two, dear," said Mrs. Grafton to Edward. "I do not think you are at all well."

"I am all right, my dear mother."

"Rebecca told me to-day, that she was sure you were ill. She was at church on Wednesday night, and at one time she thought that you were going to faint."

"Dear old thing. All nonsense. I remember, I had walked a good deal that day, and eaten little or no-

thing, and I dare say that I seemed tired. That was all, and, please, I will keep to the claret."

"Rebecca's report is not exactly confirmed by that of Mr. Blaby," said the Rector. "He told me to-day, when he came in with the books, that since he has been clerk he never heard the old roof ring as Mr. Edward made it ring that night. I thought that I had tried the rafters reasonably well in my time, but Edward delivered himself, I am told, like Boanerges, the son of thunder. I trust, my dear fellow, that you were only trying some acoustic experiment, and that you have not been taking a lesson from our friend at Jehovah-Jireh — as they have profanely christened a meeting-house here, Abbott."

"Your son takes an oratorical lesson from nobody but his father," said Edward Grafton, with not an ungraceful imitation of the Rector's style of old-world compliment. The mother's pale cheek coloured with pleasure, and the Rector himself smiled.

"*Non sum qualis eram*," he said, "but I have shouted in my time. Did it ever occur to you, Abbott, that the ancients must have had fine notions of the power of the human voice in exciting terror? Of course you remember how Achilles, when he could not fight because his armour was not ready, came to the front, and helped his party by simply bellowing."

"Of course," said Mr. Abbott, who had an excellent memory. "I think I could give you the Greek, but as Mrs. Grafton is here, that shall excuse English:

'Thrice from the trench his dreadful voice he raised,
And thrice they fled, confounded and amazed.'"

"Yes," said the Rector. "We accept that from

Homer, and it is a tremendous incident in the fight he describes. But suppose that a field officer had rushed out of his tent in the Crimea, and shouted three times at the Russians."

"I think he would have had an early suggestion to attend to urgent private affairs, and his friends would have received a telegram recommending them to 'take care of Stentor.'"

"Yet we are made on the same principle as the Greeks, I suppose. But taking the shout of Achilles for a flight of poetry, remember what stress is laid on the terrible voices of champions, classical and mediæval. Have we lost the art of frightening?"

Whatever colour there had been on Mrs. Grafton's cheek was now gone, and her habitual pallor was visibly increased.

"*You* are not well, mother," said Edward. "Let me take you into the drawing-room."

"No, dear," she said, faintly, "I would rather be here, than — than alone. Give me a little wine," she added, smiling, "a very little."

"Fill your dear mother's glass," said the Rector. "No, full," he added, with emphasis. "It will do her good, I doubt not. Again, Abbott, you attend the playhouses, I know. I have not visited one of them since the days of the Kembles, but you can tell me whether there is any voice on the stage that terrifies you."

"There are several that terrify me from going into the theatre," said the lawyer, laughing, "but there is no such organ as you mean. Nor, while I think of it, is the passion of terror appealed to as it might be, and as it used to be in the days of the Greeks."

"You could not have that passion," said Edward.

"The people believed in the Furies and the other horrors, and you struck at once on the chord of superstition. I suspect that the pit at Covent Garden would laugh at any Bogey that spoke seriously. There is always a giggle when the ghosts pop up in the Macbeth cauldron."

"That is because managers, like Bourbons, forget nothing and learn nothing," said Abbott. "I believe that with the resources of modern machinery, and especially with the aid of chemistry, I could myself devise something that would send half the house into fits."

"And the children," murmured Mrs. Grafton, in a low voice.

"Well, my dear Mrs. Grafton, you are quite right. It would be a wicked and brutal thing to do, unless one excluded the children, and announced strong meat for men only. But I think that somebody will make a fortune out of the artistic Dreadful, when the vulgar Horrible shall be re-consigned to the thieves and cads across the Thames, from whose entertainments we borrowed it. But, talking of horrors, Mr. Grafton," continued the fluent lawyer, "you spoke of dissenters, just now, and a chapel. Are you much troubled with those intruders?"

"Not very much, considering that my respected predecessor did so much to encourage them."

"Did he? I forget."

"Did he not? Why, sir, there was only that one bit of ground in the parish on which it was possible for a schismatic to build. All the rest was in the hands of men who would as soon have leased their land to a professional poacher. But this bit belonged

to an old maiden lady who was a friend of my sapient predecessor, and who actually consulted him when the fellows came to her to ask for the ground."

"And he told her to give it?"

"Not exactly in those words, but instead of using his influence, and beating such stuff out of her head, I believe he told her that he could not recommend her to do other than pray to be guided aright, and so forth. Imagine the telling a foolish old woman to go and pray for advice. Of course she improved on his hint, and called in the brethren to drink their tea and eat their greasy toast in her house, and to direct her devotions, and of course we know what that would come to. There they are, planted."

"Odd, too," said Abbott. "I thought that Mr. — what was his name — Moorhead wasn't it? — yes — I thought that he was a very zealous churchman."

"Now," thought Edward, "let us hear the Rector's definition." The younger Grafton had taken no share in the anti-schismatic dialogue.

"He was zealous enough in his way," said the Reverend Theodore Grafton, "but he was not a churchman, nor was he a gentleman."

"You mean that no true churchman would have helped in these dissenters?"

"I would be just, Abbott," said the Rector, looking very judicial and majestic. "I have no sympathy with a certain class among the clergy, and I think that they take such a low ground as proves them unaware of the true foundations of the church, which is based upon a lofty rock, and not down in a methodistical morass. But I allow that they are sometimes men whose zeal,

if not their judgment, is to be respected. It is possible that a good man may justify to his own weak mind the infusion of dissent into his parish. But Mr. Moorhead knew who was to succeed him, and he deliberately established that evening lecture, and assisted the dissenters to their chapel, because he knew my views, and desired to counteract them. There, sir, was no gentleman."

"Then," said Abbott, who was not in the least afraid of anybody in the world, "you will not give him the benefit of the doubt whether he did not think it his duty to propagate Evangelicalism, which he knew would find no favour from you?"

The Rector's brow darkened, and he wheeled himself, as it were, head and body together, as if he were a great gun, turning into position, in order to sweep everything away with one tremendous explosion. But when he found himself confronted by the merry eyes of the lawyer, who was rather amused at the ire which he knew was stirring in the celestial bosom, the same wisdom which had guided the high priestess of Dorcas, when her spiritual power was challenged, came to the aid of the high priest of Saxbury. He somewhat loftily, yet adroitly, turned his thunder into a compliment, and said,

"Mr. Abbott, your own sense of gentlemanly conduct is so high that you are unable to comprehend the vulgarity of the man's conduct. We will not pursue a disagreeable subject. Pray help yourself."

At this moment Edward Grafton's mind was disturbed by a course of sensations for which as yet he will have received little credit. He had certain impressions, if they did not amount to convictions, as to the great re-

sponsibility of the Christian priest in regard to doctrine and to example. And however imperfectly he understood the case, and however readily he allowed himself to neglect that class of ideas, he held a faith, and he believed that his father had none. When, therefore, he heard the Rector sonorously enunciating the superiority of certain conventional rules, called gentlemanly behaviour, over the dictates of conscience and of fidelity to awful vows, it was Edward Grafton's instinct to enter his protest, as a priest of the same church as his father, against being supposed to hold that worldly creed.

But he was silent. He felt unequal to face any kind of storm at that time. He was troubled with other matters. His heart was in another place. And he satisfied himself with a *cui bono*. His mother knew his views. He did not care whether his father knew them, or not. And was it necessary to parade one's theological principles in order to set oneself right in the eyes of a London lawyer, a man of the world, who probably had that extraordinary tolerance, which men learn in society, for every kind of opinion which does not break out in bad taste, or lead its owner over your own corns? Therefore he held his tongue, but mentally protested against the sentiments of his father.

His mother saw, or fancied that she saw, on his face some indication that he might be tempted into controversial assertion of his own ideas, and she instantly roused herself (with one of those exertions of which loving women make a hundred for one that is recognised and thanked by those for whose sake they are made), and entered into the conversation.

"Mr. Grafton has often thought," she said, "of

putting an end to that evening lecture. It is scantily attended, and it causes us a good deal of inconvenience."

"We should hear of it in Naybury, if it were discontinued," said Edward.

"That consideration would not have much weight with me, Edward, as I think you know," said the Rector.

"It would have some with me," said Edward, "for if we could feel justified in the alteration, I am ashamed to say that I should feel a very considerable pleasure in it, as a kind of defiance to a clique at Naybury which arrogates to itself inquisitorial powers, and of which a Londoner can have little idea."

"A sort of Vigilance Committee, eh?" said Mr. Abbott. "O yes, I know a deal about such folks. There was a junta of the same kind in the town that Mrs. Abbott came from, and I flatter myself that I had the honour of exploding it, by bringing an action for defamation against one of the members for words spoken by his wife. It was very hard upon him, but the example told, and we smashed the amateur convocation."

"Then there must have been traitors in the camp," said Mrs. Grafton. "How did you get witnesses?"

"We managed it, Mrs. Grafton. I must not say too much, but Mrs. Abbott's knowledge of all the people, and especially of the hopes and fears of certain marriageable young ladies, came into play in the happiest manner. We did not go into court, but we got an apology, and a gift to an hospital, and something rather pretty in the way of costs."

"We must talk to Mrs. Abbott, when you bring her down, which I hope you will soon do," said Mrs. Grafton, "and she must instruct us in her way of taming these dreadful dragons."

"If I were not speaking of ladies, however unworthy of that name, my dear, I should be inclined to substitute the word cats for dragons," said the Rector. "They meet at one another's houses, Abbott, under pretence of making clothes for the poor (of which I dare say they make very few, and which they had better buy of the local tradesmen), and they take the conduct of the clergy and other leading people into consideration, and pass verdicts."

"Have you had the honour of being dissected?"
"O yes," said Mrs. Grafton. "We are very unfavourably looked upon."

"I hope so," said the Rector, though really it is almost unworthy of us to be aware of the impertinence."

"Ah, then they do not issue a mandamus, and call upon offenders to answer for their practices?"

"I am half inclined to say with Edward that I should like to come into actual collision with them. But I do not think that they have the courage to risk that. We have been here a long time, and though in an indirect way they have ventured to let it come round, as by accident, to the ears of Mrs. Grafton, that this parish is not managed in the way they approve, they have not dared to communicate with me. I own I wish that some of them would pluck up the spirit to come and beard me."

"I dare say that they would hear something to their advantage," laughed the lawyer. "The worst of it is, that we must not be rude to a female deputation."

"Be assured that I meditate no rudeness. But I think that the first deputation would be the last."

"Then," said Mrs. Grafton, "I may as well tell

you something, Theodore, which I heard this afternoon only, and I could not mention sooner, as you have been out with Mr. Abbott. Edward, my dear, I think that you have brought the storm down upon us at last."

"I, my dear mother"

"Yes, you seem to have been charmingly unguarded in some remarks which you ventured to make to Mrs. Bulliman, and a lady, who begs that I will only mention her as a little bird, has hinted to me that your conduct was to be taken into consideration at a Dorcas meeting this evening. Do your ears tingle? Perhaps the ladies are scolding you at this very instant."

"Why, Edward," said his father, smiling, "what direful deed have you done? I thought that you and that lady were such good friends, and I have not been without fear that you might some morning ask me whether I should object to an evangelical Gorgon for a daughter-in-law."

"You have put an idea into my head," said Edward, "and of course it shall have due consideration. But, mother, dear, what on earth have I done to blast my prospects of happiness?"

"Did you not meet Mrs. Bulliman and her charming daughters the other day, that is to say, Wednesday? Come, Edward, no love-secrets from your mother."

"It is too true, mother."

"Well, you know best what you said, for my little bird would not tell me. Only it was something very awful."

"I have no recollection of anything beyond some chatter about some lecturer. I was in a great hurry. I did my best to get away from the Bullimans."

"That was natural. I really cannot blame that," said his father.

"I have told you all I know," said his mother, "so you had better be prepared for the worst. Perhaps, Miss Phœbe, or Miss Sophia — you know best which — will speak in your defence."

"I think I had better telegraph for Mrs. Abbott," said the lawyer. "It is evidently time to bestir ourselves. And Edward's evident innocence is the worst feature in the case, for he will be convicted to a certainty."

The younger clergyman sat silent, trying with all his might to recollect what had passed, but he could get at nothing except a general impression that the Bullimans, whom he hated, had stopped him in the street near Chervil, the chemist's, and that he had escaped as soon as he could from talk about missionaries.

"Stop!" he said. "One of those girls was to write to me about something. Which was it — what was it?"

"Don't look at me so accusingly, Edward dear. I assure you that I have intercepted no letters," said his mother, laughing.

"This begins to be serious, my son," said the doctor, with affected solemnity. "I hope not to learn that you have been playing with the feelings of a Gorgon, but when she proceeds to threaten correspondence, parents become anxious."

"I am innocent," said Edward Grafton. "Time will prove it. Meantime, unless the storm you speak of bursts, mother, I must live under suspicion."

"Shall I go into Naybury in the morning, Edward,"

said Mr. Abbott, "and try whether I can learn anything? Your father's son may command my services. Or shall we set a spy to work?"

He spoke in the idlest banter, but Edward Grafton flushed crimson.

CHAPTER XIII.

Damon and Pythias.

MR. THOMAS TICKELL'S name abideth not in the memory of many, and few of the rustic moralists who, by reading homely texts strewn on tombstones, learn to die, are aware that his pen set the copy that may be read in every churchyard, — the lines in which the deserted Lucy states to her weeping virgins that she saw a hand they could not see, which beckoned her away. Still fewer readers of verse know that in honour of Kensington Gardens, to which we are about to accompany some acquaintances, Mr. Tickell indited a long poem, detailing the woes of the nymph Kenna, who laid out her slaughtered lover in the form of snowdrops, which "whitened half the shade" of those gardens. The poet asserts that Kenna gave to the neighbouring town its name, but cold-hearted antiquaries, who lack romance, will tolerate no etymology so graceful, and fall back upon Koenigstown as the parent word. We hold these up to the indignation of the myriads of lovers who, like Kenna, have plann'd that Landskip in a morning dream.

"You must feel, Ernest, that this should have been done long ago," said Colonel Latrobe, as the two men paced one of the quieter walks in the Gardens. They had been talking for a long time, and very gravely.

"In one sense, yes, if it were to be done at all." He spoke the last words in a tone that might imply dissatisfaction with some resolution at which he had arrived.

"You are the only person who can judge about that," said Walter, answering the other's meaning rather than his words.

"You must see that I had no choice," returned Ernest. "That is, of course, I had the choice between the terms I have told you of, and ruin."

"There are various kinds of ruin," said Latrobe, quietly, as the brave and handsome little officer generally spoke.

"What?" said Ernest Dormer, angrily. "You are not suggesting that I should have let myself go to the bad, or cleared myself in the bankruptcy court, then have gone in for the life of a well-dressed cad, tolerated by men who despised me, and revenging myself by picking them up at billiards and that sort of thing?"

"I am suggesting nothing, Ernest. It is not my business to suggest. You had, I believe, about three hundred a year, which was safe?"

"Yes, and I should have had to set apart a hundred at least, for creditors."

"And have had two hundred to live on?"

"Live on! Live on four pounds a week! What makes you talk such nonsense, Walter?"

"A man may live on four pounds a week without being a cad, Dormer. I know three friends who live on three pounds a week, and each has a wife, and two have children."

"But gentlemen?"

"All my friends are gentlemen, at present."

"You understand me. My dear old fellow, I have asked you to do a most disagreeable thing and you do not like it, and God knows I don't wonder at that. But do not revenge yourself by being ill-tempered with me. You can't know how I torment myself."

"Perhaps I do," said Walter Latrobe, gravely, but not with any increase of kindness in his manner. "But you say very truly that the work you ask me to do is most disagreeable — and worse. It is not so much the mere errand — such affairs have to be broken off in most cases, and women ought to expect that they will. But in this case matters on one side have advanced so much further than they ought to have done before we give the other side a hint, that I must own to you that I wish you had asked somebody else."

"You are quite certain that I am talking no lying nonsense to you, Walter, when I say that I have asked you simply because of all the men I know you are the man to do the thing in the kindest way."

"I dare say that may be so," said Walter Latrobe.

"You know it. But I do not seem to have convinced you that I have lost no time, or rather that I did not go further than I was compelled to do, before breaking off with poor Lucy. I fought for time, though I hardly know why I did, if the end were to be the same."

"That is twice, Ernest, in a few minutes, that you have implied that you did not desire such an end."

"Nor did I," said Ernest Dormer, in a low but determined tone. "I was happy enough — at least I was tolerably content, except at rare times when I got out of spirits and took to thought — and Lucy was as

happy as a bird. If the thing could have gone on it should not have been broken off by me. There! It is not to another man in England that I would have said so much, and you may live to fling it in my teeth; but I have said it, and it is true." Which statement he confirmed by solemn words, said too earnestly to be written down against him as a sin.

"I am glad that Miss Conway is not my sister," said Walter Latrobe, "though I believe in my soul that you will make a good and kind husband. If I did not, I would not do this for you."

The simple, honest manner of that brave young soldier, as he said this, was something to see, and something that unless it had been seen would not have been believed possible by many women who had heard him whisper things that were neither simple nor honest.

"I will behave as a gentleman, at least," said Ernest Dormer. He had promised a good deal more in the letter which we saw Magdalen Conway receive on the grass plot at Naybury. "But, Walter," he added, earnestly, "do understand this, or you will not do me justice now, or when I may want it even more than now. I could not have gone on for another month. Everybody pressed. Even the Jews began to press, and they always behave better than any other creditor, but they saw the time had come. I laid the whole facts before the Stepneys."

"Your uncle and aunt?"

"Yes," said Dormer, bitterly, "they are my uncle and aunt, no doubt. How that Mrs. Stepney came to be the sister of my mother, the best woman who ever lived, I don't know. But it is so. Well, I was

treated, I suppose, as well as I could expect. That is, as I could expect from such people as the Stepneys."

"You told me that they had previously made you some considerable advances."

"Yes, they let me have a couple of thousand pounds, eight or nine years ago. But every shilling that old Stepney has in the world he owes to my late father, who made him. That's nothing, you will say."

"I say no such thing, and I never knew that fact before. Now that I do know it, I suppose I get a new light in their behaviour in this matter of the marriage?"

"I want no light that can make their behaviour seem less detestable, and therefore do not you try to make excuses for them. They were exceedingly gracious and polite, and asked me to dinner three times while they were making up their minds how best to wound my feelings. Finally it was announced to me that they would do nothing at all, unless I married and became what they were good enough to call a respectable member of society. In that case they would not only free me from my debts, but would settle on me and my children the little estate which had been my mother's, and which old Stepney bought when our crash came."

"Fourteen hundred a year, they say at the club."

"Just like the idiotic trash you get at a club. Fourteen hundred devils! It will be about seven hundred — perhaps the odd fifty."

"And the three of your own. Come, as regards mere money you are not so badly off."

"That three are encumbered, but my first act is

to clear that, and you know whose it is for ever afterwards."

"I do not consider that your language about your relatives is exactly just. Decorous and religious persons, as I think you say they are, look at marriage as a duty, and of course have a right to their own view. All things considered, you are very well treated, Ernest. It is not every uncle that would restore between seven and eight hundred pounds, from a recollection of the kindness of a dead brother-in-law."

"You have not heard all, or rather you have not listened."

And this was true. Thought is sometimes possessed of a mad power of self-guidance, and it rushes away with the bit of will between its teeth. Dormer had told Latrobe the rest of the story, but had previously made him aware of the service Ernest was about to ask. And so it was, that while Ernest Dormer was proceeding with that detail, the young soldier's thoughts had, for some inconceivable reason, flown back to that hill-fort in India, and to the slaughter of the savage heathen; and the little umbrella which Colonel Latrobe was thrusting so fiercely into the Kensington gravel was moved by a far different agency from that to which Dormer attributed his friend's behaviour. Perhaps the incidents of that fierce battle day were the most exciting which had ever marked the life of Latrobe; and perhaps it is in nature, when sorely disturbed by one subject, to seek homœopathic remedy by recurring to another period of excitement. But who knows, and who would be the better for knowing, the secret of the fantastic phenomena of such association?

"I believe that something escaped me."

"This is what you ought to bear constantly in mind. I would say nothing against the conditions, so far as — as you remember them, except for a belief which I have, and which I will tell you. But so resolved were the Stepneys to clench the nail, that though they would have saved money by paying a certain debt for me on the instant, they announced that they would pay neither that, nor anything else, until I should come to them, and state that I was engaged to be married, and could show the assent of the lady's parents or guardians."

"Well?"

"I see. You mean that they had come to doubt me, and were wise in taking precautions against my availing myself of their money, and not marrying."

"Such things have been done. You would not have done so, but Mr. and Mrs. Stepney had perhaps no reason for much confidence."

"They did not doubt me," said Ernest Dormer, with some haughtiness. "I have never behaved otherwise than as a gentleman. But I believe, Walter Latrobe — yes, on my soul I believe, that the Stepneys — that is, the wife, knew all about Lucy, and my way of life, and that she makes the pecuniary sacrifice, which is nothing to her, for the sake of making me miserable, which is a great deal to her."

"Everything is possible in this best of all possible worlds, Ernest, but some things are very improbable."

"Yes, but some improbable things happen, and this is one of them. I tell you that I believe Mrs. Stepney knew all about me, — for what I know she may have been down yonder to the Hut, like an old

hawk glowering at a chicken-hutch, and seen the merry little home and its inmates — and then have gone back to devise the surest way of breaking it up.”

“Even that, Dormer, would not have been a wrong, regarded from the point of view of a certain class. On the contrary, a duty.”

Instead of answering this, Ernest Dormer cursed his aunt.

It is disagreeable to write down such facts, but it would be worse to pretend that men of the present age, when they are angry and bitter, do not use language which is both vulgar and wicked. They did the same in past ages. In the next, of course, all will be reformed.

“I think, Ernest,” said his friend, “that I am aware of all that I need know. I don’t seem to want to have your reasons for charging your relations with malice, which is unaccountable, while their proceedings are perfectly clear on other and very obvious grounds. How would it sound, if put thus? A rich and pious uncle and aunt know with pain that their nephew is living in defiance of the rules of morality; and they gladly avail themselves of his extravagance to come to his aid on condition that he marries a good girl, and becomes an orderly man, and they offer him a liberal settlement as a reward for doing so.”

“Yes,” said Ernest, savagely, “that is the story, told in the purest conventionalism, and that is the way the Stepneys will tell it at their infernal tea-tables. Meantime one heart breaks for certain, and perhaps two.”

“Your own!” said Latrobe, looking up with real surprise at what he deemed an extraordinary piece of sentiment from a man ordinarily not sentimental.

"Mine," scoffed Ernest Dormer. "No. Do I usually talk much about myself?"

"Then, Ernest Dormer," said the young soldier, turning full upon his friend, and speaking with a frank dignity which seemed to come instinctively to the true gentleman, "if I understand you, I go no farther in the matter."

Dormer looked earnestly at him, but did not reply.

"For nobody else," continued Latrobe, "would I undertake such a task. But not for you will I do it, if I feel that I am only helping you one step along a course of shame and misery. You and I are not of the sort of fellows who talk cant to one another, and I hope we are also incapable of another kind of humbug. You have just hinted, for the first time, that you are not going to play fair."

"You know," said Ernest, flushing to the handsome eyes, but making a desperate and successful struggle with his anger, and contriving to speak in a tolerably calm voice, — "you know that when anybody but a friend says such a thing —"

And here his voice in its turn conquered *him*.

"One knocks him down," said Latrobe, completing the sentence for his companion, "and when one's friend says it, one asks him what he means. I will tell you what I mean. Your debts paid, your income secured, and yourself married to Miss Conway, what then?"

"What then? We live in her father's house at Naybury, as stipulated by Mr. and Mrs. Conway. I don't understand you."

"You intend to live there always, and to behave to your wife as if your marriage had been a love match?"

"I intend to behave to my wife with all the attention, respect, and kindness in my power. Whether affection may come later, I know not. But she shall have no reasonable cause for complaint. I know her to be a most amiable and admirable girl, and though the marriage is forced upon me, she shall never know that. Miss Conway does me much honour in accepting me, and she will find me sensible of that honour."

These sentences were somewhat abruptly given out, but Ernest Dormer spoke proudly and sincerely. Of course it was not much to promise in regard to an affianced bride, and it was less than nothing, and far worse than nothing, supposing the received ideal of marriage to have been in question. But — men are very tolerant of men — Walter Latrobe appeared to be satisfied.

"I believe you, my dear Ernest. I should tell a lie if I said that the match seems to me to promise very well for your happiness, but we must take things as they are."

"It is my turn to ask you, Walter, why you put such questions to me?"

"Because you spoke of more than one broken heart."

"I understand. And the man whom I call my best friend instantly sketched out a black picture, in which I was the principal figure. You were good enough at once to dart at the idea that, having married for worldly reasons and against my wish, I should revenge myself on an innocent wife, and make her miserable because I was discontented."

"You put my thought into coarse words."

"But it was your thought."

"Yes," said Walter Latrobe, with his truthful look. "And it was mine, for an instant," said Ernest Dormer, seizing his friend's hand with a sudden grasp — an action altogether apart from the undemonstrative manner of the day, — "it was mine, I am ashamed to say, for a moment; not, by Heaven, that I ever believed myself capable of being a scoundrel. But the bitterness that came over me, and that always comes," he added, fiercely, "when I think of the way this has been forced on me, makes me unjust to myself and everybody else. You have spoken so bravely and faithfully to me that I can't help meeting you with the same frankness, though you know that I am not much given to making revelations of my feelings. Walter, I have been so damnably wretched for the last month, that I have envied every fellow who has been killed in a railway or stifled in a coalpit." "Everything you tell me, old man, makes it clearer and clearer that the marriage ought not to take place."

"It must and it shall," returned Ernest, "and what is more, I will try to make it a happy one for the person chiefly concerned."

"So may it be. And now you had better go away — go out of town, I mean. Don't let anybody know where. Be away for a few days."

"Yes," said Ernest, turning very white. "I understand. But you must have my address. I insist on that. And you must write to me," he added, earnestly.

"I had better not. See me when you come back."

"Write to me, I tell you," said Dormer, emphatically. "Promise that."

"Yes, I will write," said Latrobe. "You will go this afternoon. Leave me word where—leave a line at the Octagon."

"I won't go there. The fellows congratulate me. I will send a note there, though, or to your place. You've promised to write—no silence for reasons of discretion—I shall have a letter, after."

"Yes, I say. Good-bye."

"I will thank you when we meet, my dear old Walter."

"See, first, that you have anything to thank me for," muttered Latrobe.

In another minute they would have separated, when suddenly two cries, of joyful surprise, were heard by the men, and the next moment Ernest Dormer was the prisoner of two children. One little girl clasped his leg. Another laid as firm a hold upon one of his hands as both of her own could give her. The child at his hand might be about six years old, the other about half that age.

"What! Mopes, and the Dormouse, too?" said Ernest, leaning down to kiss them. "Who is with you, dears—who is taking care of you?"

"I am taking care of the Dormouse," said the elder child; "but now you must take care of both of us, Kraken, and take us home."

"Yes, Kaken, home," lisped the little one. "We's lost our way," she added, opening her large eyes, as if she was recounting a very clever action.

"But, Mopes, you were surely never sent here by yourselves. How could—anybody be so foolish?"

"Nobody is foolish," returned Mopes. "But Sara has enough to do in nursing poor mamma, so I took

the child out for a walk," she added, with the dignity of a matron.

"Nursing, dear? Is mamma ill?"

"Very ill, Kraken; and you must come and cure her."

"Vey ill, Kaken," echoed the Dormouse. "Tum-mun turer."

"How long has she been ill, Mopes?"

"I don't know. Many days and many nights; and the doctor won't let the clock strike."

With a hasty farewell to his friend, Ernest Dormer yielded to impulse, and hurried from the Gardens with a rejoicing child at each hand.

"*That* looks well for the marriage," said Walter, quietly. "I shall wait further orders. To be hit so hard, and yet not hard enough to make him do the right thing. Now, I could not bring myself to feel for any woman — at least any woman of that sort — what Dormer feels for Lucy. I suppose my nature is sterner than his. But, if I could feel as he does now, would I tear my future into tatters for the sake of position? Why, he had got hold of a person he loved, and they were out of the way of want, and all that he was afraid of was the going to quod for a fortnight, and passing through the Bankruptcy Court, and being mentioned in the papers, and having his name taken off the lists of the Octagon and the Empyrean. All those dreadful things done, he could settle down with his Lucy, marry her, if he liked, and be happy. Of course, he would be a most awful idiot to do anything of the sort, if he was not sure that he knew his own mind. But he is desperate spoony on that little female, I never knew how much till to-day. Still, not enough to pre-

vent his making himself miserable elsewhere. Position, and perhaps the comforts. Well, yes, I think he cares about the comforts, though he doesn't make a fuss over them like some of those epicurean asses at the club. He might have had a good deal of that, too, at the Hut — she is very handy, and he might have earned a lot of tin from Sam Mangles and elsewhere. He is quite right to do what he is going to do, and he is a great fool for doing it."

CHAPTER XIV.

Old Friends, and a Photograph.

CHARGED with her self-chosen mission — not one of the class especially favoured by Mrs. Bulliman, yet one whose avowed object that lady might, on conscientious grounds, have approved — Mrs. Faunt, having committed her Lar and her Penates to the protection of the superior powers by the simple process of locking up her cottage, proceeded on her journey to London. The excellent woman was unincumbered by luggage, except a portly basket, containing, among other things, refreshments for a traveller, and a handsome silver-cased bottle, whose costliness might have made an observer suppose that it was not in the hands for which it had originally been destined. This Mrs. Faunt took care to fill, in a somewhat secret manner, at the railway station, and the cordiality with which she imparted sups from her flask, during the journey, to sundry of her fellow-passengers in the third-class carriage, won her considerable favour. Indeed, a thin young man, of shabby-genteel appearance, who wore a cap over his short hair, and who sat as far back as

possible into his corner at the stopping-points, as if unambitious to attract the attention of officials, expressed great ocular admiration of the article of luxury, and just previously to nearing the large and dirty manufacturing town at which he was to alight, made an attempt to sit next to the good-natured lady. But his attentions were not, perhaps, appreciated, or perhaps they were. At all events, when he crossed from his corner to Mrs. Faunt's side, and seemed very curious about the scenery, Mrs. Faunt quietly imitated his movement, taking the place he had quitted, and moreover took an early opportunity of bestowing upon him a slightly contemptuous wink, a mark of regard which induced him to colour very highly, though perhaps not with the sensations which such a token from a lady should inspire in the bosom of a young gentleman. He remained in a sort of collapse until the train stopped, when he hastily slid rather than stepped from the carriage, and disappeared. Mrs. Faunt was then pleased to laugh a little chuckling laugh, and once more to refresh herself from the silver flask, at which she looked for a moment in an affectionate manner, as a mother might look upon a child whom she had preserved from some danger. We regret to have placed a lady in a third-class carriage, but the little incident will have relieved the reader's mind from any apprehension on her account. Mrs. Faunt was quite able to take care of herself, and of that which was hers.

Another incident of the journey afforded her less satisfaction. The silver flask had become empty at an earlier date than Mrs. Faunt had intended, and she availed herself of another stoppage to fill the vacuum

caused by her liberality to her companions. While she was keeping a watchful eye on the young lady who was pouring in the best cognac (how bad was the best need not be said), Mrs. Faunt was touched on her ample shoulder by a stranger, who said,

"I am very glad to see you!"

He might have been, some joy is too deep to produce appropriate effect upon the voice. But the tone was one of extreme gravity, and when Mrs. Faunt reluctantly turned her dark eyes from the young lady and the flask, and looked at the speaker, there was nothing in his face to testify to the sentiment he had avowed. He was a tall, somewhat military-looking person, in black, closely buttoned-up to the throat, though the afternoon was a warm one. Mrs. Faunt's talent for repartee was usually ready, nor had it deserted her then.

"The gladness is all on one side, then, for I don't know you."

"Are you quite sure?" said the stranger, not with much apparent affection, but as if he chiefly desired to hear her voice again, for he looked away while listening for her reply.

"Safe as houses," returned Mrs. Faunt, something pertly. "Now, my dear, take my money."

Which my dear did, with an air of supreme disgust, and in her turn looking away, as she handed Mrs. Faunt her change. It is pleasant to note how well the early simplicity and nobleness of mind endure in the case of many young women compelled to commercial pursuits, and how distasteful to them is the coarse process of mercantile transfer. It is not wonderful that they often give you wrong change and bad

money, when the whole business is so palpably revolting to their refinement.

Mrs. Faunt retreated to her carriage, and the stranger rather pertinaciously followed her, and saw her get into her place. When the officer came along to examine the tickets, the other accompanied him, and listened to Mrs. Faunt's replies to several questions which were put to her about her ticket, and its place of issue, as to what she had paid for it, and whether she had shown it at any previous stations, and which. Then the train went on, and a mechanic in the carriage said,

"Them questions seemed put for a purpose like."

So Mrs. Faunt thought, and she held her peace until she reached London, and in the meantime did not make a single application to her spirit-store. She did not know the stranger, and, for reasons of her own, she was disquieted at his wishing to be able to claim her acquaintance.

But here was King's Cross, and she must get out. The train, however, was a heavy one, and there were plenty of imperious and dominant first-class passengers to command the services of the officials, and plenty also of experienced and bustling second-class travellers to cajole and shoulder them into the luggage pen,—so a third-class person, without anything to look after, could easily escape unnoticed in the dusk, and Mrs. Faunt glided away, but thought that she saw her enquiring persecutor watching the faces of the crowd that was clamouring and abusing, and growling, and pointing, and gesticulating around the boxes.

"Joy go with you and a bottle of moss," muttered Mrs. Faunt, as she went out from the terminus, not

exactly knowing what she meant much more than we do, but it may be supposed that she was reciting a little song of satisfaction at having eluded the watchfulness of the stranger. And she crossed into Gray's Inn Road. Then she turned aside into an alley and watched for a good half hour, to discover whether she were to be followed. At last, satisfying herself that she was not, Mrs. Faunt emerged, and walked boldly, and not with a hurried pace, down the squalid Lane, and into Holborn. She might have taken a shorter cut for the street which she wanted, but, all-worldly and wide-awake as she was, she nevertheless yielded to the inextinguishable wish that drives a Londoner, who has been some time away from his city, into the first of its great, noisy, brilliant, crowded arteries which he can reach.

Mrs. Faunt treated herself to an hour of Holborn, and enjoyed that hour. For a certain class of women such a lounge in such a place has a marvellous attraction. For it she will leave her comfortable fireside and creature comforts on an evening when her male acquaintance think her, and occasionally convey to her that they think her, an idiot for going out. For it she will even renounce the pit of the theatre, and the subsequent hot supper, and will come home to a house deserted by its lord (who is at the tavern), and a cold bone. For it she will risk the fiercest quarrel with that lord, when it is his pleasure that she should stay with him and mix his grog while he smokes, and her pleasure lies in the other direction. Mrs. Faunt, answerable only to herself, had a good spell of Holborn, and saw sundry of its sights after dark. She was pushed and hustled, and her dress was a good deal

trampled. She stared into the shops, and even made long halts before them; though it was hard to conceive what interest the contents of the windows could have for her. Yet she looked angrily round when any one ran against her, and interfered with her gaze at meerschau pipes, and photographs, and costly china, and velvet chairs. She was savage with omnibuses when they delayed her crossing over, and she crossed several times, not without peril. She saw a tradesman's child hurry over the roadway to post a letter, and in her reckless rush encounter a cab-horse, and fall, and as the child's head hung over the shoulder of the Samaritan who was carrying it to a doctor's, Mrs. Faunt saw another child, of about the sufferer's age, but precocious in crime, cleverly steal the little shawl of the victim, dive amid the legs of the bystanders, and escape. She saw a very respectable man examining the books on a stall, and while the lad in charge was taking another customer's money, she observed respectability slip into its pocket a volume not worth sixpence. She felt three or four attempts on her own pocket, but having picked this herself, before plunging into the crowd, she scarcely took notice of the efforts, except to turn and see a lean boy skulking off, or to mark the preternatural unconsciousness with which an older but undersized young scoundrel turned to the kerb, and looked serenely to the heavens. She passed Gray's-Inn gate and saw a lady, whose veil did not quite conceal her prettiness, descend from a cab and hurriedly enter the inn at an hour when clients do not usually find legal advisers, and other eyes than those of Mrs. Faunt observed her. A pale, well-dressed man, with compressed lips, glared at the disappearing figure,

and a stout man with him, a detective officer, held him back from following. The mild eyes of a sister of mercy, out on a far different mission, also took in the scene, and her lips murmured a prayer. The panorama finished with a desperate fight between two Irishwomen who had strayed, quarrelling, from the lane, and each of whom had been unable longer to bear the unfavourable sketch of her family history and personal character tendered at the top of a hoarse voice by her companion, and with the entrance of the police on the scene Mrs. Faunt retired from her amusement.

One additional reason for her having thus beguiled an innocent hour was present to her. She had a visit to make, but did not wish to make it very early. But the hour had now come at which Mrs. Faunt thought that she might carry out her intention, and therefore, proceeding westward, she turned to the right, into one of the small streets which lie north of the great thoroughfare.

Mrs. Faunt stood before the window of the shop of Mr. Dudley, the medical gentleman of whom we saw something at the outset of our story.

The shop was not closed. Not that the hour for closing an apothecary's shop had come, to justify Mrs. Faunt's idea that business would be over, but Mr. Dudley's ways were mysterious; and when it pleased the practitioner to order up his shutters and turn out his boy, Mr. Dudley did so without the slightest regard to the habits of other tradesmen. Tradesman, indeed, he used often to assert angrily, when under the influence of liquids scarcely less deleterious than those he sold, he was not, but a professional man, who was obliged to attend to the detail of his profession; and the defini-

tion was favourably received when he happened to be in the humour to treat his audience.

Mrs. Faunt watched; she had a talent for watching, and it is an art that requires cultivation. Mrs. Faunt had practised it for various purposes, the most harmless of them being instinctive self-defence, for many years of her life. She did it without an effort. She saw Mr. Dudley behind his counter. She saw him listening, rather contemptuously, to a pale young wife (the ring was there), who was showing him, very sadly, the face of a sickly infant evidently about to be soon delivered from the evils of this present world. Yet he replaced the torn handkerchief somewhat tenderly over the baby's face, and though the coppers offered him for the medicine were evidently too few, he gave a good-natured toss of his head, as he pitched them into a drawer, and called the young mother back to add a word or two of advice. Then he listened, much more intently, to the whispered confidences of a servant girl, and having given her a packet, sent her out with a jest, which, however, did not make her laugh. Then he lost his temper with a deaf man, whom he scolded loudly for not instantly swallowing, there and then, a black potion, which Mr. Dudley mixed by rule of thumb, and which very likely was the right medicine, but over which the poor man hesitated, because he did not understand that Mr. Dudley had understood him. Then, the shop being clear, Mr. Dudley had leisure to remember that he owed his boy a box on the ear, and immediately discharged that debt, and while the master was adding some paternal advice, bearing directly upon the youth's spiritual future, Mrs. Faunt entered the shop.

"Good evening, Gum Benjamin," she said, pleasantly.

Mr. Dudley might have imitated her remark at the railway station, and observed that the pleasure was all on one side. For his own rather good features assumed an expression of even more than their wonted discouragement, and the boy was incensed because the entrance of the lady had checked a fiery oration which he had begun at great speed, and which was designed to apprise his master that if he ever dared to do That again, he, the sufferer, would smash every blessed bottle in the shop and summons him.

Mrs. Faunt repeated her greeting, and while Mr. Dudley is considering how to meet it, we may mention that his name was Benjamin, but that the playful adjunct was given in some old days of sport, and bore dark reference to the time when he began to practise dentistry, with afflicting results to some of his fellow-creatures.

"I would as soon have seen the devil," was Mr. Dudley's frank response to Mrs. Faunt. It rejoiced the boy, at all events, for he saw some sort of Nemesis in store for his master, and therefore with utterly unusual alacrity hurried round and set a chair for the visitor, even resorting to the unheard-of and elaborate politeness of dusting it with a handkerchief which he snatched from the counter.

"All in good time," replied Mrs. Faunt, "so don't be impatient, Benjamin, dear. It was always your besetting sin, you know, and is still, or I shouldn't find you still keeping a miserable shop in a back slum."

The exquisite pleasure which this sketch of his

employer's home excited in the face of the boy can only be realized by those who have studied the countenances of London lads, and it is not a study to be pursued for its own sake.

"What do you want?" was Mr. Dudley's next and practical remark.

"Nothing that you sell, rely upon that," said Mrs. Faunt. "Though you might have had the manners to offer an old friend something refreshing and stimulating after a long railway journey."

"Where from?" said Mr. Dudley, sharply.

"From the right-hand corner of the middle of next week," replied Mrs. Faunt, very quietly, and setting her head aside at him, in the odd way of which we have seen something.

"I have nothing to say to you, and I want to have nothing to do with you."

So ample a renunciation of friendship would possibly chill the regard of the fastidiously sentimental, but Mrs. Faunt was not one of these, and replied, simply, —

"Don't make a fool of yourself."

And then she took a bottle of lavender water from a glass tray, and in the coolest manner tore away the red paper, drew the cork, and liberally besprinkled herself with the perfume.

The action might reasonably have enraged Mr. Dudley, but it did not. Perhaps it operated in the nature of a libation to the infernal gods, and stilled the devil, Wrath. Perhaps Mrs. Faunt's last words conveyed more to his ear than that piece of advice, so frequently tendered and so seldom taken, might have been expected to do. At all events Mr. Dudley

turned to his subordinate, and ordered him to shut the shop.

"Did you please to wish it shet, m'm?" asked the youth, with sublime impertinence, and a most respectful manner to the lady.

Mr. Dudley's hand fell to a certain brass machine like a roller with a handle, used in the manipulation of pills, and it was even betting whether its flight from a practised and powerful hand would have materially damaged the rebel, or whether the latter, expert at dodging, would have shunned it (as Bruce did the spear of De Bohun at Bannockburn) to the detriment of the plate-glass door. Happily, the bolt was not launched, for Mrs. Faunt, laughingly accepting the situation, said, —

"Yes, my good lad, I particularly wish it shut."

More and more confirmed in and cheered by the conviction that something disagreeable was going to happen to his friend and master, the boy put up the shutters with an alacrity to which Mr. Dudley had never been able to drive him. Not one fell down and occasioned a row with a hurt passer-by, not one stuck viciously, so that Mr. Dudley himself had to come out and wrench it into place; nor was one poked through the glass, though all these disasters had been known to happen on the same night, when the relations between employer and employed had been unusually disturbed.

"He can go now, Mr. Dudley?" asked Mrs. Faunt, in a gentle voice.

"He'd better," was the response, with a growl which could by no means be described as gentle.

"Then there is five shillings for you, my boy,"

said Mrs. Faunt, "and be sure that you are a good boy, and mind all that your good master tells you. What is your name?"

"Cubb, m'm, which you may spell it with two b's, m'm, if you would be so good, m'm. Other name, Spitty, m'm. Cubb Spitty, m'm, and greatly obliged to you, I'm sure, m'm."

The sudden largess had actually astonished the boy into speaking with a boy's simplicity, and had discharged all the hard London pertness, for a moment, as one of his master's acids might have discharged a colour. But it was only for a moment; his sense of wrongs came back, and but for a stronger impulse he would have dared all Mr. Dudley's wrath by a series of offers to do, or fetch, or ask something for Mrs. Faunt, and would have persisted in this until his master became outrageous. But the stronger impulse conquered. Mr. Spitty thirsted and burned to be off, in order that he might lose not a moment in beginning to gamble away his money with some club friends, usually peripatetic, but who could command a play-saloon (a Jew's garret), when noble sums were to be staked. He did but stay to snatch his cap from under the counter, and with an earnest good night to Mrs. Faunt, Mr. Cubb Spitty vanished to be plundered. Fast as he ran, many an educated young gentleman was just then driving faster to his club for a similar purpose and doom.

"You should make much of that boy," said Mrs. Faunt.

"I'll make something of him, one of these days," said Mr. Dudley, but the tone was not exactly that in

which a kind parent or guardian speaks hopefully of his charge. "Now, what do you want here?"

"I think I hinted to you, in a delicate sort of way, not to make a fool of yourself, Benjamin," was the reply. "If polite language has no effect, I shall have to try another. Come, we've known one another long enough to dispense with any nonsense."

It may be that Mrs. Faunt, in her amiable desire to produce the required result, used an emphatic word just prior to the conclusion of her sentence, but it is not necessary to interpolate it here. Her class has no feeble terror of availing itself of the resources of our powerful language, when conviction has to be wrought or commination to be pronounced.

"I should think that you would hardly care to be seen about here," said Mr. Dudley, evasively.

"That is my business. But you are very right to be careful of me; and as I used always to say, there is a deal of good in you, only it takes a deal of pains to find it out. So you may do what you have in your mind, and what you were just going to ask my leave to do. Shut up that door, so that I may not be exposed to the vulgar, for you know I hate vulgarity, and then get some supper ready."

"There's nothing. I was going out."

"Then go out, as you intended, and turn nothing into something. You know my tastes."

Again Mrs. Faunt looked steadily at him in her odd way, and that look did its work. In half an hour Mr. Dudley, of London, in the little room at the back of his shop, was entertaining Mrs. Faunt, of Saxbury, at an improvised supper which excited that lady's unqualified approbation. Its details would probably af-

ford no hint of value to a refined housekeeper, or they should be reproduced with the fidelity which belongs to conscientious art, whose object is the improvement of mankind.

During the repast, Mr. Benjamin Dudley preserved a silence which might have been called sulky. He did the honours of the table without any manifestations of pleasure, but it was not in Mrs. Faunt's nature, when she had a purpose before her, to be disturbed by such a trifle as the conviction that the gentleman with whom she was supping was restrained by prudential reasons only from mingling in the beverage which he brewed for her in that back room the very deadliest of the medicaments which he kept in the front. She chatted with some sprightliness, and even complimented Mr. Dudley upon the brownness and curliness of his whiskers and beard. Mr. Dudley endured her liveliness until it became intolerable, as will happen in the case of the liveliness of ladies immeasurably her superiors; but at last Mrs. Faunt fairly composed herself, with her feet up on the little black sofa, to the enjoyment of her computations. Then, though she had probably never heard of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, or of her charming picture of the hour

"When we meet (with champagne and a chicken) at last,"

Mrs. Faunt addressed herself, in the spirit of that hour, to reminiscences and epigrams, and then Mr. Dudley took occasion to speak his surly mind, and to signify once more his wish to know what his visitor wanted with him.

"Well, you might wait till I pleased to tell you, I think, considering that it is a precious long time since

you have had the good feeling to inquire after me, or learn whether I was alive or dead."

"Dead. No, I knew you were not dead," said Mr. Dudley, without any particular intimation that such knowledge was the happiness of his life.

"I know you knew it, but no thanks to you for asking."

"Well, you are alive, and here, and now what next? You did not come here only to see me and get your supper, I'll swear."

"Don't say swear, Benjamin, because it's vulgar, and, what's more, the word brings to my mind a remembrance that some people have sworn, in the course of their life, to things that would not bear any great degree of swearing to."

"I'm past frightening, Charity."

"May be so, Benjamin."

"That dodge has been tried until it won't do any more. I tell you that. As you say, I haven't seen or heard anything of you for a long time, and so I tell you that. It will save trouble. I'm not what I was in the old days, and so don't you waste your damned cleverness. Now, you understand?" He spoke doggedly, almost savagely.

"What? We have grown a respectable medical man, and meet swell physicians in consultation, and are in the confidence of distinguished families, and have repented of the sins of our youth. Only to think. And who would have thought it? And then to see our modesty and humility. Though we are the favourite adviser of the high aristocracy, we are not too proud to sell a penny powder for a sick baby, or to let a housemaid have two pennoth of hair oil that she may

go out smart on Sunday. How I should like to look over your books, Benjamin. May I? Fetch them in here. There was a time when you would have shown them to me."

"Yes."

"Yes," echoed Mrs. Faunt, as if incensed at something in his tone. "And I'll tell you something more, Benjamin Dudley. There was a time when you didn't dare enter in your books things which I knew of, and had helped you to. Do any items of the kind come to your mind?"

"Jabber."

Mrs. Faunt was very good-tempered, but she had taken a long journey, and had been annoyed during its course, and she had supped, and she was altogether rather disposed to relax her rein upon her anger. The word was really an offensive one, and the voice was even more offensive.

"Is it that?" she said, wrathfully. "We shall see."

"Drop it," said Dudley, fiercely.

"Will I, then?" retorted Mrs. Faunt, defiantly. "I have not come a hundred miles and more to be put down by you, Benjamin Dudley."

"I should like to know what the devil you have come a hundred miles for, though Saxbury is more than that."

"O, you knew I was at Saxbury. What did you ask me for in the shop?"

"Just to see whether by any chance you would not tell me a lie. You have told me one or two in your time, Charity."

"Yes, I have," said Mrs. Faunt, with rather an ex-

ultant laugh. "And you have believed them, too. We were neither so sharp nor so respectable in those days, as we are now, eh? But we needn't quarrel, Benjamin. When I look at you, so handsome and so clever, and shut up here in this miserable hole selling rubbish, for coppers, my heart quite softens to you, Benjamin."

If it did, a person who only heard and did not understand the words would hardly have arrived at the discovery.

"We need not quarrel, as you say," said Mr. Dudley. "It takes two to make a quarrel, and I don't mean to be one of them."

"This is the man who could not be frightened. Why, Benjamin, you are frightened already, my dear man. Do you think I don't know you?"

"No you don't," replied Dudley. "But you will, if you do not take care of yourself, and meantime you may remember that I know you."

"O, isn't that cowardly!" laughed Mrs. Faunt, who had regained the mastery over her temper, and by way of solemnizing that triumph, had refilled her glass, "isn't that cowardly, to menace a poor defenceful woman, who crawls to your door; weary with travel, and begs a mouthful of food? You have done some cruel things in your time, Benjamin, but I did not think you would ever be so hardhearted as this. You make me regret the interest I once took in you, and the pains I gave myself to push your fortunes."

"I can't make you out," said Mr. Dudley. "You were always flighty, and I suppose it has grown upon you. Else you would not lie there talking infernal nonsense. If you have business of any sort to mention, mention it. If not—"

"Well, and if not?"

"I am going out."

"I am not."

"Going to stop here?"

"Not here, Mr. Dudley. Do you mean to insult me? I am going upstairs."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. What's that song you used to sing so well, or did you recite it, I forget? Something about He's no tenant of life's back slums, He comes to the world as a gentleman comes To a lodging that's furnished and taken. Don't look at the brandy bottle like that — your insinuation is in the highest degree offensive to a lady. Has not my luggage arrived?"

"I know nothing about it. Yes, by Jove, there was a beast of a box came this afternoon, and I had to pay a porter. You sent it?"

"I telegraphed that it might be sent. Where is it?"

"Upstairs, I suppose."

"And there is my lodging also. I believe that you have nothing to do with anything but the ground floor, Mr. Dudley? I happen to have engaged a room on the second floor, and I don't see that you have any business with my arrangements. What you paid the porter shall of course be honourably repaid."

"I think you are mad, Charity; but mad or sane, I am going out."

"Leave me here — you may do so safely. I will not rob your till, or look into your books."

"You would not rob the till. The other thing you would do from the cunning instinct you always had for learning anything, on the chance of its being useful some day or other; and if you told me you had not

looked at the books, I should think your brain was softening. I do not choose that anybody should look at them."

"Lock them up, then."

"That you may pick the lock. It would not be the first by scores. I would give odds that you have a picklock in your pocket."

"Then you'd lose, for it's in my bosom, with my purse. But I see that you have preserved a faithful recollection of some of my cleverness. I was always too many for you, and I intend to be so again one of these days, but only for your benefit. You have no idea what a good, kind soul I have become at Saxbury, retired from the vices of this wicked city, and under the sacred ministrations of various reverend clergymen, too tedious to mention."

"You! and clergymen."

"Don't speak like that, as if I were an infidel. I tell you what, Benjamin Dudley," she added, suddenly changing her tone of lazy banter for another, "I have known some clergymen in my time, and so have you, and perhaps you need not talk as if it were out of nature and reason for me to have anything to say to a parson."

"By Jove," said Dudley, with a scoff he could not repress, "I don't think that it is at all out of nature or reason either that you should have a good deal to say to a parson one of these days, and have to say it, too, before the clocks strike eight in the morning."

"Do you know, Benjamin, that I consider you little, if anything, better than a brute?" said Mrs. Faunt, so pleasantly.

"I dare say I am. No matter. Are you going to tell me what you have come for?"

"What has procured you the pleasure of this visit, you mean? A medical man seldom gets on unless he studies politeness. Well, I will tell you as much as you need know. I have come to town to find out something which a friend of mine wants discovered. And I have come here, because I don't know any place where I should be less likely to be bothered with unwelcome visitors."

"You were wanted some time ago, I can tell you."

"Not much, or I should have been found. I have not been keeping out of the way. I have only been living in modest privacy, but not so retired but that my friends could find me if needful—you, for instance, for you just said so. Are you going to try to frighten me, in my turn, Benjamin?"

"Why should I? Only don't blame me if you are heard of as being here."

"Which means that we are going to a tavern, or somewhere, and are going to write a message?"

"I may, if you pester me. I shan't, if you are wise."

"Listen to me, Benjamin Dudley. I see how the game lies, though I have not concerned myself about you for a long time. At first I thought that you were just what you were when I could be of some use to you—a poor druggist, living in a poor street, from hand to mouth. I see you pretend to be just the same, but from the way you talk, and one or two other things, I believe that you are making a purse, and all you want is to be let alone until you are able to make a bolt. Now, deny that, not that your word would go for much with me."

"Then I need not speak. Go on."

"You have spoken, my dear Benjamin, and to good

purpose. But don't give way to low suspicion, and above all, don't suspect me, who have been your friend and confidential adviser. I don't want to injure you, and I don't want to hinder your plan. But it shall not be carried out without my leave, to say the least of it."

"Yes," said Dudley, with a shrug. "I thought we were coming to that at last. Plunder. Try it, that's all."

"Not quite all, Dudley," said Mrs. Faunt, significantly. "When I try a thing, there's generally something to follow, and that is my succeeding. Now I don't think it can be needful for me to remind you of a few occasions on which we have assisted each other."

"I don't care whether you remind me or not. But suppose I remember everything?"

"If you do, you will think that it is not quite sensible to hold this tone with me."

"I defy you, and all that you can do. Take that. And now take yourself away, and do your worst," said Dudley, on whose temper this protracted nagging had at last produced its effect. "I will be badgered no longer. If you want money from me, you will not get any. Do you hear what I say?" he added, angrily, for Mrs. Faunt had taken up a newspaper that happened to be lying near her.

"It's such a pleasure to see a paper of the same day," she said, "after being reduced to newspapers of a week old, which one had to get hold of anyhow. What's going on, Benjamin—you used to be a great reader?"

"Not much," he answered, scoffingly; "but there's a case before the Union Street magistrate that may interest you, perhaps."

She turned to the report, glanced over it with a smile, and said,

"Committed. The woman deserves all she got for trusting that kind of doctor. She must have known that he would sell her, if it was made worth his while, and if she had not taken care to provide evidence that would keep him quiet. Every woman is not such a fool."

"One woman is, who is trying to trade upon a power which she had, but has not got now."

"Time, perhaps, has worn it out?" asked Mrs. Faunt, whose dark eyes gleamed, just now, in rather an unwholesome way.

"No, Charity," said Mr. Dudley, calmly; "Death has saved time the trouble."

"You are lying to me," said Mrs. Faunt, sitting up for the first time during their dialogue; "I have frightened you, and you are lying."

"Think both if you like," said he, "but," he went on, again getting into a rage, "you shall have plenty of time to think about it, and all other things, and plenty of the quiet and seclusion you like so, if you dare to attempt anything against me. I tell you fairly that though you are very clever — yes, rascally clever — you *don't* — as you say — see how the game lies. Perhaps, after you have paid a visit to Highgate Cemetery, you will."

"What shall I see there?"

"See? A great many tombstones, some of them bearing inscriptions which make the devil laugh when he walks about there. But there's one which will not make *you* laugh, nevertheless!"

"Dudley," said Mrs. Faunt, slowly, "you are a

shallow fellow. You would always purchase a few days of peace by some clumsy shift, though you knew all the trouble would come back again the same as before. You would always do it in money matters, and you would give solemn promises which you knew you could not keep. And it was the same in important things, and is the same now. You want to get rid of me at any price to-night, and you have invented a lie which I shall have to look into. Forty-eight hours hence or less we shall be again where we are now."

"Go to Highgate Cemetery, I tell you, and look until you find something interesting to you. And as you were always rather sentimental when not greedy of gain, buy an *immortelle* as you go along, and deposit it, with any tears you may have ready, on a stone which you will find, if you look long enough."

"It is false," said Mrs. Faunt, at last surprised out of her bantering manner, "I have a letter — no matter. It is false."

"You have had several letters from *her* — four or five at least. You had one about three weeks ago."

"Yes, I had;" she answered fiercely. "And so she has died since that?"

"I did not say so."

"You had better say what you do mean, man," exclaimed Charity Faunt, now in an unmistakable rage.

"I hate to give pain, especially to a sensitive woman," replied Dudley, with evident enjoyment of the turn things had taken. "It grieves me to inform you that it is nearly two years since the object of your affectionate enquiries was deposited in the silent tomb."

He drawled out the last words with an admirable

imitation of the conventional manner of imparting news of bereavement.

"Two years!" she screamed out. "She has written to me three times since January."

"You must remember the peculiar beauty of her handwriting, then," drawled Dudley.

"She could scarcely write, I know that well enough; but she could sign her letters, and did — what a liar you are!"

"I excuse your language, in consideration of your sorrow, my poor Charity. I am touched, very deeply touched. To show you how *my* heart softens towards *you*, I will save you the long search I advised, though of course you will make an early visit to the grave of one so dear. Excuse me for a moment."

He took some keys from his pocket, and went into the shop, and the look which Mrs. Faunt sent after him meant small good. Presently he returned with an envelope, from which he took a photograph, and this he quietly laid before her. It represented a tombstone, slightly ornamented, and bearing one inscription. It was in memory of a faithful and attached female servant, whose mistress's name was also given.

Mrs. Faunt read the inscription again and again, and put the photograph into her bosom.

"You might have asked me for it," said Dudley, "but it is yours."

"Yes, it is mine;" said Mrs. Faunt, in a low voice.

"I felt that I was wrong to leave London. I knew that it was wrong all the time I was going."

"That allegation is considered by the lower class a sufficient excuse for doing anything wrong," said Dudley, "but I did not expect to hear it from you."

"Don't provoke me just now," said Mrs. Faunt, with a glare in her eyes.

"But do not reproach yourself. Even your presence could not have prevented the untimely departure of your friend."

"Forged letters!" And Mrs. Faunt swore an oath of anger.

"Such things, at least, were no novelties in your experience, Charity. I think we have heard of such things. I think that for certain money well and duly paid to a lady of my acquaintance, arrangements were once made whereby a wife was enabled to read letters from her husband which he had never seen — do you remember how very imbecile the coroner was at the inquest on that poor lady?"

"You have done a bitter, bad work for yourself, Benjamin Dudley, in lending yourself to this treachery against me, and you will live to know it," said Mrs. Faunt, who had not heeded his last speech. "I had no evil intentions against you when I came to town, I swear it. Perhaps I meant to do you good — I swear I meant no harm. But now —"

"War to the knife?"

"It may not be worth my while, Dudley," said Mrs. Faunt. "I think it is most likely that you are still the beggar I predicted that you would always be, and I shall not waste trouble. But if I do find that I can serve any purpose of mine by making London too hot for you, expect to be served out."

The phrase was a vulgar one, and decidedly unworthy of the occasion, but it was the natural utterance of the speaker. Having thus delivered herself,

Mrs. Faunt took up the poor old bonnet and shawl in which she had travelled, and opening a side door, apparently well known to her, went out, and upstairs, where, as she had truly said, she had taken lodgings.

Mr. Dudley carefully locked that door, and lit a black pipe.

CHAPTER XV.

Mangling in his Lair.

It will be remembered, we hope, that at the secret conclave which was held at the Octagon Club, soon after the farewell banquet given to Ernest Dormer, a revelation was made by Mr. Wigram to Mr. Mangles, and it was conveyed in a whisper, because some other men came in at the moment. That night, Mr. Mangles, having various affairs to attend to, and notably to go to the Opera, could not devote much consideration to the subject. Our friends should be satisfied, nay, grateful, if we take any trouble about them when we have nothing particular of our own in hand. But Mangles liked Dormer, and even at intervals of *La Favorita*, and although Lady Syleham (whose box it was) and her very pretty daughter Isabella, were capital people to help one through an opera, by talking incessantly, and rather well, the question recurred to the mind of Mr. Mangles whether he should say a word to the bridegroom elect. After putting the ladies into their carriage, he looked in at two clubs, and heard many things, good and evil, and then he went into Mr. Evans's, and heard many songs, mostly good. Among others, he listened to Horace's *Integer Vitæ*, arranged as a glee, and this curiosity in music amused

him, and he speculated, as men will do when the night is old, upon what Q. H. F. himself would say, if brought in by his honourable friend Mæcenæ, (who of course paid,) inserted into one of Mr. Evans's comfortable arm-chairs, supplied with a kidney, a potato in its skin, and a glass of pale ale, and requested to listen to Ode XXII., as performed before a party of gentlemen smoking cigars. And as Mr. Mangles strolled on to Lincoln's Inn Fields, he kept muttering *Integer Vitæ*.

"No," he said, "the bows and arrows would be of no great use to him, except the long bow, which is a fashionable weapon of offence and defence. Wonder whether Henry Wigram pulled it. I don't think he would. But you never know anything in this world. I will consider about it in the morning."

But the morning brought its own business, and Mr. Mangles, the editor of a critical journal, had a great deal of correspondence to attend to, or to decide on neglecting. It is easy enough to answer letters, but it requires a more delicate instinct to know exactly what letters you may lay aside on the chance of their answering themselves. Mr. Mangles, however, had too long endured persecution by correspondents not to know reasonably well how to save himself needless trouble. He sat down to the enormous table which was the prominent article in his large and handsomely-furnished room, with the air of a skilled operator, and the beautiful Persian cat that instantly sprang into the luxurious arm-chair which he had quitted, did not assume her place with more composure, or more feeling that claws were things to be used only in cases of extremity.

The first letter Mr. Mangles took up was a large one, and he opened it with a mild grunt. Of course it contained a note, and a manuscript. The writer was a stranger, and a literary aspirant. He was young, and therefore assumed that playful jocularly in addressing an editor which a raw hand thinks so captivating. Further, he mentioned that he had "just dashed off" the article he enclosed, and he had no doubt that he could do much better. A younger editor would perhaps have taken the trouble, as he dropped the proposed contribution into the Drawer of Despair, to have said,

"We can wait until he does much better."

But Mr. Mangles had seen too many of such communications to bore himself by saying a single word.

He took up another, which had no enclosure, but which was a note of eight close sides. It apprised the editor that the writer had taken in the journal from the beginning, but that he and several influential friends had resolved to discontinue it. The *Vivisector* had so greatly fallen off from what it was, that it was evident that an inferior class of contributors was now employed, and the editor was warned that many of the articles gave great offence to persons who were quite as capable of judging merit as any hack journalist.

"I fancy I know that ass's writing," murmured Mr. Mangles. "I'll show the letter to Pruth."

Mr. Pruth was the sub-editor, and was in the habit of calling on his friend and chief, and discussing matters of editorship. It was not yet his hour.

"Now then," said Mr. Mangles, with the tone of a wronged man, as he opened a packet, and eight or ten carefully folded papers fell out. He knew, without

looking into them, that they were only food for the spill-box, but he glanced at two or three, and saw that they were religious lucubrations on scriptural texts. The note, a gentleman's, intimated regret that the *Vivisector* gave so much space to theatrical criticism and race notices, and suggested that a series of articles like those enclosed would give a worthier tone to the paper.

"Colney Hatch must be too small for the lunatic population," said Mr. Mangles. "I suppose it has out-patients, who are allowed pens and ink. What's this? Verses. Well, a good squib's worth having. Let's see —

"The world hath now no joys for me,
My day of hope is o'er,
Nor love, nor wine, nor melody,
Will e'er enchant me more.

"My eyes ——"

Mr. Mangles made some cursory remark in reference to the sentimental poet's eyes, and tossed the bard's verse into the waste-basket.

The next was more interesting, inasmuch as it was from a firm of attorneys, threatening the *Vivisector* with an action for libel, unless it apologised, in an article to be supplied by themselves, paid fifty pounds, and six-and-eightpence for that application. The complainant, who had been wronged by the strictures of the journal, was a quack, whose medicaments had been referred to only in illustration of the success obtained by puffing. However, Mr. Mangles knew what jurors would do for an aggrieved brother tradesman, and he took up the file of the journal, to see whether he had given the pettifoggers a chance. After a glance at the paragraph and its context, he saw that he was reasonably safe,

but enclosed the menace to a stern and most respectable solicitor who had brought several legal gentlemen, for their attempts at similar extortion, to extreme grief and dismay. And he made a mental memorandum which should not be exactly in the interest of the quack, when occasion might serve.

Then, not in the sweetest mood, perhaps, though undisturbed, he opened a letter of introduction from somebody whom he had once talked with, for ten minutes, while the hounds were at fault, and who begged to present to him somebody else, not personally known to the huntsman himself, but of whose talents the latter had heard a good account from an Irish friend whose name had escaped him. Would Mr. Mangles see Mr. O'Bog, and read a manuscript novel and some poems of the young man's? Mr. Mangles did not say that he would see the young man hanged first, but he looked as if, were the alternative proposed to him, he should not require much time for deliberation.

A pleasant odour, suggesting a lady's envelope case, arose with the next note. Everybody likes to be flattered; and from the man who tells you that he does not, lock up your spoons and your daughters. Mr. Mangles, old hand as he was, read with a certain pleasure three prettily written sides of graceful compliment on an article which he himself had composed. He read with less pleasure the fourth side, which began, "And now —" and which contained the request to which the affectionate critic had led up so charmingly. She wanted Mr. Mangles to give her a box at the Opera, for a certain night — a night of extraordinary attraction, and when double prices would be asked at the libraries.

"You are a good judge, my dear, both of literature and music, but——"

You *must* write a falsehood in such a case, if you like the lady enough to care about keeping on terms with her, and Mr. Mangles, who liked the lady in question very much, immediately sent her, by special messenger, a reproachful letter, quite scolding her for not having asked for his box before he gave it away, as she well knew that nothing would have delighted him so much as giving it to her, except the being allowed to look in — as he would gladly have done — and he was really at present unable to see his way to forgive her.

Well, he told stories. But what would you have had him say to a pretty and amiable lady? "I have got an opera-box, but I shan't give it to you, because I want to go myself, and take some people whom I like better than you." Would you have a man behave brutally? Very likely the lady was not deceived; but Mr. Mangles had given her no valid excuse for not asking him to dinner.

It is needless, and it would not be altogether gracious, to dwell upon sundry other letters received by Mr. Mangles, in his capacity of head of a band of reviewers. A cold world might be irreverent over things which it imperfectly understands. Enough to say that if sundry authors gracefully brought their published compositions under the notice of the distinguished critic, it was probably because retired scholars, unacquainted with the regular habits of business houses, might surmise that their publishers had neglected to forward the volumes. Or, if any special merit or circumstance, which in the author's mind entitled his work to the favourable

notice of the reviewer, were modestly pointed out, it may be assumed that this trouble was taken, less for the sake of obtaining plaudit and notoriety, than in order to enable the *Vivisector* to fulfil its mission as a faithful exponent of the leading literature of the day.

While Mr. Mangles was laughing at a letter accompanying a volume of poetry, which the author would not have thought of publishing (she said so, and must have known), but that friends had wished that the gratification she had afforded them might be extended to a larger circle, Mr. Pruth was announced.

"How are you, Pruth?" said Mr. Mangles. "What a fine day! Where will you sit? Turn out Fluffy, if you envy her the arm-chair."

Mr. Pruth was a small, dark man, who always dressed in black, and never smiled, whence, by light-hearted *collaborateurs* he was known as the Undertaker. But he was not in the least saturnine, and was a very good fellow. But he was newspaper all over. He thought, spoke, wrote, dreamed of nothing but newspaper. His first great duty in life was to see that the new number of the *Vivisector* was all right, and his second was to prepare material for its successor. He was an invaluable second to Mangles, and inasmuch as, though a gentleman, he cared little for society and man's companionship (a spinster sister at home, who read theological works all day, and narrated their contents to him in the evening, over their tea, being the only person whom he was supposed to love,) he was especially useful when disagreeable things had to be done, as they would have to be in managing a journal, were angels the contributors. The slash that took out a too warm or too caustic paragraph, the manipulation

that transformed a ferocious sarcasm into a grave remonstrance, the abbreviation that brought a vast article within reasonable limits, these were Mr. Pruth's doings, or Mr. Mangles said so, and Mr. Pruth accepted the responsibility. Mangles would allow no quarrels with himself for anything which he chose to say Pruth had done, and so enraged and able men cursed Pruth in his absence, everybody's mind was relieved, and the *Vivisector* was capitally edited.

"See here, Pruth," said Mangles, laughing again. "Here is a lady who says that we ought to give her a kind review of her poems because her uncle — no, her second cousin — was tried by a court-martial in India, of which my father was one of the members."

"I have heard worse reasons given by authors, and so have you," said Mr. Pruth. "If your father helped to get her relative shot, clearly you ought to do something for the family. That's a legal and equitable claim, compared to some that I remember. I wish I had kept a collection of such things. I was once asked to write a puff of a play, on the ground that the author and myself were vaccinated from the same child."

"You never told me that. That will do again, Mr. Pruth, and I know you won't go and tell it where I shall."

"I don't think I ever told it to anybody except my sister, and she did not seem to regard the claim as at all out of the way, and hoped that the vaccinations had been successful. Have you anything for me?"

"I have not looked half over these infernal letters. Just overhaul the big ones for me, that's a good fellow. I say, what did you think of Norman's article, after all, when you came to read it quietly?"

"That it was first-rate, and that Norman didn't write it."

"That struck *you*?"

"Compare it with anything that he has done before. And then how came he to know so much about medals. It's no cram. I may say this, as I happen to know a good deal about medals."

"And most other things, I fancy, Pruth?"

"Not a bit. I am as ignorant as a pig about a heap of things, but then I have made it my business to know exactly where to find out about most things. I tell you, positively though, that Norman never wrote that article. I don't believe he knows a Domitian from a Diocletian."

"Degraded wretch — he's as debased as myself. But he has got hold of somebody who does. Well, I'll praise his article awfully, as the only good thing he has done, and see whether he splits up. On second thoughts, I don't know. I might get another good paper by taking things easily. When he sends in a bad one, I shall know what to say."

"You must have an article on the Prayer-book next week. Rugeley's really not up to that. He has sent in a thing — here, I wish you would read it yourself. It's not worth setting up."

"Thanks, I won't read it, but I'll tell him what I think of it."

"And Derwent has sent in one of the best things he ever did — out and out good. On private theatricals."

"Ah, and I know where he got his inspiration. Does he say anything about handsome legs?"

"Yes — a trifle too much."

"Let me have a proof directly, will you?" said Mr. Mangles.

"And there's that paper of Dormer's — it stood over, if you recollect, that it might be used at the right time — it is very good, and this will be just the season for it."

"I know you like his papers," said Mangles. "I think you like him." And Mr. Mangles leaned back in his chair, and mused for a few minutes. His companion, who knew his ways, did not answer, but took out a long paper, printed on one side only, and began looking through it.

"You like Dormer?" said Mr. Mangles, again, after a pause.

"I think he is one of our best men. A little given to letting his reading and writing appear when there is no occasion for such vanity, as Dogberry says, but there is plenty in him."

"Yes, I quite agree with you. Is that his article? No, I don't want to read it — but is that a bit of Greek at the end?"

"Two lines, and I wish that you would tell him to take them out. He shouldn't stick up a fence at the end of the race, it's discouraging to the general reader."

"What are they?"

"From the end of the Odyssey. He says that it is a noble thought which concludes the poem. Ulysses and Minerva are slaughtering in all directions, when the fire from Jupiter's hand falls between them and the vanquished, and the sword is stayed, and he makes it mean that though brute force and worldly wisdom

may league to crush the helpless, there is a Supreme Court of Appeal."

"Our friend is sentimental," said Mangles, smiling.

"That is not his habitual fault."

"It is no fault — in moderation — for our purpose," said the shrewd Mr. Pruth. "But now you mention it, I have noticed that in his papers, for some time, he has been getting out of the club-cynical, and writing what you call sentiment. I knew that you would stop him when he got too soft, so I said nothing."

"Pruth," said Mangles, "I am inclined to ask you into a confidence."

"I had much rather you didn't, unless it concerns the paper."

"It does not concern the paper, and yet I want to speak to you. It happens that you don't come, a great deal, into the sort of society that you have just been describing, the club-cynicals, and you live in an honester and purer atmosphere, where people are not ashamed of their natural feelings, and where everything is not tested by the artificial views of a clique."

"That is a very neat sentence, but I did not know that I deserved it."

"Yes, you do know it, and you know that I very often come to you to take the taste of the smoke-room out of my mouth. Now, give me your judgment in a matter that is puzzling me."

"It will not be worth having. I am so out of your swim."

"For that reason, I tell you. A friend of mine is going to be married. A good match in every respect, — position, money, beauty."

"And mutual affection? After that question, you see how fit I am to say anything about your friends?"

"Do be patient. The question is a very right one, but that is not the point. In fact, I hardly know how to put the point to you, without making you think too much or too little of it. For it may be a great deal and it may be nothing of the sort."

"With submission, it seems that you do not yourself know the case."

"Just so. But still I can get at your idea. Some of the acquaintances of the engaged man have heard some scandal about the engaged lady. They would no more dream of telling him of it, than I should think of throwing up this window and bawling out to that dirty nursemaid there — do you see her? — that she has dropped her shawl. But there may be a friend of his who might feel it his duty to say something."

"Yourself?"

"Or another, if you so decide. But what ought one to do? I need not set before you the difficulty of the position. The match may go on, and be rendered unhappy. The match may be broken off, and the story may prove a lie; and whichever way it takes, the man will hate the informant for the rest of their lives."

"He ought not to do so, if the information be given on sufficient grounds, and as a friend's duty."

"There it is. I have no grounds, that is, none within my own knowledge. And it may be difficult for me to make you understand that from the way a very few words were said to me I form an opinion which I should find it hard to justify, except to myself. You never married, Pruth?"

"I never married. I never shall marry. But had I married, I should have sought a wife in a home in which the very word scandal was utterly and totally unknown. I have my own ideas about matrimony. They will not assist you in this matter."

"We shall see. Ought I to say anything to my friend?"

"Ernest Dormer, of course?"

"Yes, I have no secrets from you."

"But I can't answer you, for I don't know what you imply. Words have so many meanings. To my quiet, straightforward Camberwell mind, scandal means an imputation that a woman is more or less immoral — unfit to be an honest man's wife. Is this what is alleged against the lady?"

"Without answering the point-blank question with a point-blank reply, I will say that if what is whispered —"

"Whispered?" repeated Mr. Pruth, with some scorn.

"Why, yes, literally, for it was told me in a whisper, from circumstances. But it would have been said in an audible voice if the coast had been clear. You need not get on the aggressive. I was going to answer you that if I heard of my intended wife (there's no such person, my dear Pruth, don't look hurt,) — if I heard of my intended wife what is said about Dormer's *fiancée*, the marriage would certainly not take place. And yet I can tell you nothing definite."

"Nobody has been more sarcastic on club-scandals than you."

"*Rem acu.* If I thought or could make myself believe that this was only a bit of the ordinary cackle,

do you think I would mention it? But accept from me my conviction that there is something in the story."

"I have heard none. When a woman goes wrong, there is a man and a place and a time, of which we hear something. Have you got any of these?"

"Something about a place, and a very little about a man."

"You know that you may be doing the wickedest wrong. In five minutes the whole business may—I say it is possible—may be cleared up, and then you have the accuser on his knees, and a woman stung to death."

"Women don't die of unfounded scandals."

"I could tell you another story."

"Perhaps. But my concern here is rather for my friend, who, if I take the harsh view, is being led into a match with a lady of unfavourable history."

"I shall not offend you if I say—"

"Anything—hang it, need that be said between us, Pruth?"

"Well, then, if I say that your notions of friendship and mine may be two. I have very few friends indeed, perhaps not three in all. For one of those I would do what I suspect that you have not the least intention of doing for Mr. Dormer."

"What's that?"

"Make it my business, day and night, to investigate the matter, and so be able either to warn him off the marriage, or to attend the wedding with a clear conscience."

CHAPTER XVI.

"Of Friends, however humble, scorn not one."

MISS GRACIE CLARE was fulfilling the brief remainder of her engagement at the theatre from which she was lured by the arts of Mr. Mallow to grace the new burlesque at his establishment. Messrs. Beaumont and Fletcher were minding their business, like practical men, and "Dido and Æneas" was in rehearsal at Mr. Mallow's theatre. It was on one of the last nights of Miss Clare's old engagement that she was coming out at the stage-door, (making a parting enquiry of the porter whether any of her admirers had left her any letters or presents,) when Gracie was suddenly addressed by a female voice.

"Well, I declare! What good luck, my dear! If there was anybody in London I wanted to see more than anybody else, it was you. How well you look, and how pretty, How odd that I should pop upon you at the right moment!"

It was not so odd, all things considered, because the speaker, having ascertained that Miss Clare was playing in the last piece, had been waiting near the door for three-quarters of an hour.

That speaker was Mrs. Faunt. But not now in the mean attire of Saxbury, but handsomely garbed, and looking like a well-to-do matron of the middle class. Only, if any one happened to have taken any sort of dislike to this excellent woman, in her baser dress, that sentiment would perhaps not have been diminished by the sight of Mrs. Faunt in her costlier vestments. And with them she had assumed a manner which it may be inferred that she conceived

more appropriate to her appearance than her usual careless *brusquerie*.

"O, you, Mrs. Faunt?" said Miss Clare, with extreme coldness. "I have not seen you for a long time."

"I have been in the country, my dear, for the sake of my health, which was giving way amid the dissipations of London. And I am glad to find that I have been missed by one friend at least."

"Who is that?" asked Gracie, to whom it certainly had not occurred that she was the person.

"Why, now, yourself, my dear. You said that you had not seen me for a long time. You say pretty things without knowing it, as the Princess used to drop toads and frogs, I mean jewellery, in that piece you played so charmingly, when you made such an effect upon Lord Walter Barbel, — don't you recollect?"

"I recollect something about Lord Walter, and you, Mrs. Faunt, and I prefer to forget it, if you don't mind," said Gracie, sharply.

"My dear, you were very young, and you easily mistook many things. Don't be angry with me. And how is your dear mother?"

"Very well, thank you. Good-evening, I am rather late."

And Gracie Clare was going away, with a fast step, when the elder lady came to her side.

"I won't detain you, my dear, I'm sure, and you are much too pretty not to have better engagements than with poor old Faunt."

"I am going home to sup with my mother, Mrs. Faunt," repeated Gracie.

"And you cannot do better, my dear, I'm sure. Always keep your mother with you when you can. I've known it lead to promotion little dreamt of. But just tell me one thing, dear."

"Well?"

"You know Lucy?"

"I know half-a-dozen. Which do you mean?" said Gracie.

"The egg-lady, you know."

"Yes, I know her, — what then?"

"Where does she live?"

A double motive for a white lie instantly flashed across Miss Clare's mind. She hated Mrs. Faunt, for reasons of the young lady's own, and would therefore have been glad to refuse her any information. But an instinct told her that Mrs. Faunt was after no good.

"I don't know."

"Why, you were such friends."

"Yes, but we had words, and I don't know much about her, except this — she found London did not agree with her, and she is gone to live somewhere in Kent."

"Are you sure, my dear?"

"Quite certain."

"I want her address so much, and I am sure you could get it for me, if you were to try."

— "So much, do you?" said Miss Clare to herself.

"Then we'll see how long you can get on without it. Yes," she said, "I think I could get it for you, if it is a matter of consequence — if not, I'd rather not."

"But it is of consequence, my dear. I have been trying everywhere for it."

"Has she come into a fortune, brought her eggs to a good market?" said Gracie, who, after the manner of her profession, joked alike with friend and enemy.

"I won't say that good will not come to her. Any how, get me the address, like a kind child. When can you have it? — I could call at your mother's, if you would say."

"I do not think that you had better call there," said Miss Clare, loftily.

"Surely, my dear, your mother is too wise a woman to bear malice, especially when everything was meant for the best. But if you think it would be obnoxious, I would come to the theatre, and ask for you."

"I beg that you will do nothing of the kind," said Miss Clare, colouring in the darkness. "If you will tell me where to write, I will enclose the address to you."

"That, you see, I could not so well do, my dear," said Mrs. Faunt, cogitating.

"I don't see it. You must be living somewhere, I suppose," said Gracie.

"Yes, my sharp dear. But I might not exactly wish certain worthy people to know where. But if you will be so kind as to let me have it, directed to Mrs. Jones, pastrycook, corner of Henbane Place, Holborn — could you remember that, do you think? — stop, here is one of her cards — that will remind you. Could you do it to-morrow?"

"Yes, I think so. I'll try."

"I shall be so much obliged, my dear. And we have been friends so long. You must let me see you

again soon. I have a heap of things to tell you. But you are in a hurry — good night — bless you.”

“You old wretch,” said Miss Gracie Clare, as she turned homewards. “Likely *you* mean any good to any girl. I’ll give you a blessed dance about Kent, and then you shan’t find Lucy. But I wonder what she wants with the poor little thing.”

The thought would not depart from Gracie’s pretty head, and though Mrs. Nobb had provided a charming little supper for her child, and the dressed crab was perfection, Miss Clare was taciturn, and her parent (parents always suppose the wrong thing) supposed that she had been having a row with her manager about leaving him.

“Governor been cheeking you, Jenny?”

“Like to catch him,” was the epigrammatic response.

“You are down on your luck, dear.”

“Not a bit, mother. Mother, who do you think was at the stage-door when I came out? Pretended to be casual; but now I see into it; had been waiting to catch me.”

“There’s such a lot as would like to catch you, Jenny,” said the proud and motherly green-groceress.

“Which there am,” responded Miss Clare; “but this is another sort of customer. You won’t guess in a blue moon. Old Faunt.”

Honest Mrs. Nobb’s good-natured face became scarlet.

“Spoke to you? Her!”

“Yes, quite affectionate; and wants something.”

“If she’d come here she should have something,” responded Mrs. Nobb, in a great fury. “I’d stick this

pickle-fork in her for tuppence. That's impudence, if you like. I hope you gave her a bit of your mind, or a bit of my mind?"

"I had it on my tongue, and was going to let out hot, but I thought twice, mother. Now don't say I never think twice, because I do, you old thing. She wants an address."

"I know one as I'd like to give her, up Clerkenwell way, and, for fear of mistakes, I'd have her set down in a Queen's carriage, with a bobby to hand her out. What does she want?"

"Lucy's address."

"The Hut?"

"Ah! if she could hear. But it came over me that it was for no good, so I did a little mild gammon, and said I did not know, and that we had had a row, and that Lucy was in Kent; and I have been plotting how to send her all about Kent on a fool's errand. She gave me a pastrycook's card to send to."

"My girl," said honest Mrs. Nobb, "we'll keep larks for them as we like — or, leastways, as we don't hate. We won't play games with such as her. Keep out of the way of the pitch-pot, Jenny. Not with my consent do you mix, meddle, or muddle there."

"You are a sensible old woman, that's what you are," said Miss Clare, "and you may come to me for a character when you want to go out as mother to another angel. But, mother, I should like to know what she's up to."

"I'd rather not know, and that you didn't neither. Some devil's business, and it's a comfort to know he looks after his own in the end. Have nothing to say or do with her, my child."

"Not without telling you, mother, — that you may swear on a mile of Bibles. Not to flatter you, my old thing, this crab is scrumptious; and now, if I might respectfully hint at exit the Earl of Cork — eh?"

And Miss Gracie Clare winked, first at her mother, and then at a bottle of Guinness, to which the affectionate old lady hastened, in accordance with her child's suggestion, to apply the screw. But not even the tranquillity of mood produced by that beverage, which, were it half-a-guinea a bottle, would be the draught of the great ones, dissipated the recollection of the interview, or the desire to know Mrs. Faunt's purpose.

When her child was asleep, Mrs. Nobb, with maternal precaution, felt the young lady's pockets, and found the card.

"I have nine minds and a little one in," said Mrs. Nobb, "and I will, too."

In the morning there was no rehearsal, and a thought struck Miss Gracie Clare.

Ernest Dormer had, in his off-hand way, pronounced Miss Clare to be ungrateful. He had used his influence with Mr. Mangles, and a valuable recognition of the young lady's talents had appeared in the *Vivisector* — not one of those flagrant puffs which are laughed at by everybody but the writer and the subject — but a discriminating notice, calculated to make readers observe the lady for themselves. Doubtless in her heart Gracie would have preferred something in a more generously abandoned style, with the word "gem" introduced as often as it could have been managed. But though she would not have ventured to set up her opinion against that of any critic who

assured her that she was a miracle of splendid acting and a constellation of feminine fascination, she had the sense to know what served her best, and Mr. Dormer mistook the case in supposing that she was ungrateful. Miss Clare saw her way to a grievance on the part of somebody else, and was therefore very angry with Mr. Dormer in that matter, but she intended to do him a good turn when a chance presented itself.

"I don't know what he may be going to do about Lucy, but that hag shall have no finger in the pie, if I can help," said Miss Clare the next morning. "And I won't do anything without mother's knowing it, either. Mu-u-u-ther!" she screamed, at the top of the kitchen stairs, in imitation of the cry of a child in the street when the cub is enraged, or in terror. "I am going to call upon one of My Authors."

"One of your what, child?" returned a voice from below.

"One of my British Dramatists. Business, mother. Home to dinner, and if you love me — Spanish onion."

"Jenny, Jenny, stop a minute." And Mrs. Nobb hastily mounted the dark stair, holding some kind of fish in one hand, and in the other a knife, with which the good woman had been disembowelling the creature.

"Now then, mother? I thought you were old enough to know better than to run about with a knife in your hand. Don't let me see you do that again."

"Jenny, one word between us is as good as a heap."

"Better, mother, — and what is it?"

"You mind what we was saying last night?"

"Honour, mother, and all serene. You go down and finish your fish, and mind he's fit to set before one of the brightest ornaments of the British stage, who will come back awfully hungry."

"I can trust you, Jenny," said Mrs. Nobb, again descending *ad inferos*.

Mr. Francis Beaumont, as has been stated, was a married man, and he lived in a semi-detached villa in Victoria Road, Kensington, a locality estimable in itself, and particularly pleasant to a man like Beaumont, who was not so absorbed in his own special vocation as not to take an earnest interest in art of other kinds. He had planted himself within an easy distance of certain houses which in days to come will be pointed out to the London explorer as the residences of painters who did noble and lofty things in a prosaic age, and therefore merited far more honour from their countrymen than if such works had been produced when the spirit of the time gave its intellectual magnates dignified leisure for the appreciation of art, and if the chief purchasers of pictures had been other than millionaires, who wished to outvie each other in galleries the value of whose contents were estimated by their owners simply from marks on the counterfoils of their cheque books. A future age will not forget to credit the true artists of the present age with their manly resistance to the temptation to manufacture works for the manufacturing *noblesse*, and with the conscientious devotion with which pictures have been produced, though the artist knew that for years and years at least, his work was merely to be buried among

the rest of the costly furniture of a new country-house, and shut away, in nine cases out of ten, from the eyes whose admiration is his best reward. The man who loves a picture, though he cannot paint one, may esteem himself fortunate in being permitted to watch a great painter at his work, and Francis Beaumont found no small part of the happiness of a pleasant life in his friendly intercourse with artists who dwelt in or around the royal suburb.

He was concluding a late breakfast. He liked to breakfast late, and was not the sort of man to be deterred from doing what he liked even by the epigrammatic remarks of his friends, who told him that he borrowed everything from the French — even breakfast habits. Pretty Mrs. Beaumont, whom he had taken out of an early rising and exemplary country family, (in whose house you might have set your watch by the successive appearances of teapot, tray, soup-tureen, coffee-pot, and soda-bottle, typical of the five meals,) did not approve of this spoiling the morning; and though she had not confided the fact to anybody, she had secret hope that after a matrimonial episode to which, for the first time, the young couple were looking, she should be able to carry a reform in this particular. In the meantime the young wife adorned the breakfast-table, and not only permitted her Francis to read the newspaper during the whole meal, but took an interest in any items which he read out for her amusement and instruction. She had not yet acquired the habit of speaking to a servant in the middle of a paragraph which her husband was reading out — which is merely mentioned in proof that these were early days of wedlock.

"Is there anything said about the new piece last night, Frank?"

"No, nothing. But as you were there, what do you want to know about it?"

"Well, everything, I think. I want particularly to know what the plot meant, and why Eustace went to America without taking the papers which were necessary to help him to find out his brother. I thought it was the actor's mistake, leaving them on the table at the hotel."

"But, my dearest Alice, it appears to me that you have no soul for art. If he had done what you or I should have done, namely, read the papers and put them into his pocket, where would have been the motive for his galloping over hundreds of miles of prairie, accompanied by the Indian lady with no particular garments to speak of, shooting savages, and nearly being roasted in the prairie-fire. He would have simply gone to Melbourne, taken a cab to the address, and found his brother making out a bill for grey shirtings unchanged, which seems to be the chief business of foreign merchants."

"And you call it art, to make a man go thousands of miles in such a ridiculous manner, Frank?"

"Small things must give way to great. You must give way to me. The common sense of that story must give way to the Indian lady, and the prairie-fire, both very effective."

"Well, you never make such mistakes, dear. All your plots seem guided by sense, and when a surprise comes, one sees how cleverly you have been preparing for it."

"You are the wisest, truest, and best critic in

London, dear, and I hope the day will not come when you are ashamed of liking the works of the man you liked well enough to marry."

"That's prettily put, Mr. Frank, but it is nonsense. If you do anything I don't like, you will hear of it. Now, sir."

"I dare say I shall. At present I have my first fault to commit."

"I don't know about that. You had no business to be in such a rage with the coachman last night. You thought I did not hear you, but then, you see, I easily catch your voice. You were using very sad language, Frank, and it is not quite right."

"Hm, abstractedly, that is true," said Francis Beaumont. "But there are exceptional cases, and I was particularly anxious that you should not wait in that lobby, with the east wind blowing viciously. I told the fellow exactly where the brougham was to wait, and when, and he was not there."

"Then it was in my name that you used such dreadful expressions. O, Frank, are you not ashamed of yourself?"

"Not in the least. In the book of Etiquette, which I studied before I came courting, it says that common politeness declares that you should talk to a person in the language he understands. That insolent, pig-headed brute would not have understood that I was angry, if I had merely told him so."

"And yet you gave him money for himself, when you got home. Now if you had refused this, he would have had a better lesson."

"Well — yes — but perhaps the poor beast had a wife and children, and their to-day's breakfast might

turn upon my tipping him or not. You see how infinitely kinder men are than women, in spite of appearances."

"If I had been a man I would rather have gone without my breakfast than have been spoken to in that way, Frank."

"I dare say I said nothing to him that he is not in the habit of saying to his wife, with the additional point of a little beating. I lived for some time in a house near a mews, and I could hear at night what went on in the house of a coachman. He was always beating either his wife or his horses. And I knew his mistress, who believed him to be the milkiest and kindest of men, and used to praise him to me as a paragon; perhaps the very day after I had opened my window over night and bellowed at him not to be a ruffian."

"And you never told her?"

"Never. Perhaps he had disease of the heart, and it made him irritable. I could not bring myself to injure him. And most coachmen are alike. If I had to get out a carriage for the third time at one in the morning, to fetch people home in a wet fog, I dare say that I should revenge myself somehow."

"Frank, dear, papa used to say that half the tolerance which affects to be kind-heartedness is nothing but indolence."

"And he was quite right. And indolence is a sad thing, which reminds me that I must get to my work, if I am to take you out this afternoon."

"If, sir, indeed! Was it not a solemn promise that we should go to Richmond?"

"I don't remember the solemnity of the promise."

But did not Dr. Laurie look a little solemn when you mentioned it?"

"He always looks so. Do you think I do not know what is good for me, dear?"

"I think you do. I think you showed that you did about eighteen months ago when, as you said just now, one of my clever and well-prepared surprises came upon you."

"Do you think that surprised me, Frank?"

"A woman told me it did."

"What woman, sir?—and whom do you talk to about me?"

"One Alice Beaumont."

"Did I say I was surprised? Perhaps I meant at your assurance in taking my liking for granted. I don't remember anything about it. It is quite enough for you that I am here, isn't it?"

"Quite, darling. Eh! Who's ringing the visitors' bell at this hour. Some of your mystic accomplices, I suppose. I have seen a strange sight or two on these premises lately. Let me get away."

"No, Frank; it is a young lady, very nicely dressed," said Mrs. Beaumont, who had gone to the window, and managed an askew glance into the porch.

"Have you been advertising for a respectable god-mother?"

"No, nor for a goose, Frank, being already suited. I believe that this is somebody for you. I can see her face. Why, Frank, it's that pretty actress girl, you know who I mean. Oh, I should like to hear her speak. Is she—I mean would it be right for me to see her? Say it's right, Frank, if it isn't very wrong."

"But who — who?"

A card was brought in to him.

"Miss Gracie Clare," he read.

"May I stay, Frank?" This in the quickest whisper.

"Yes, dear, yes," he said, something impatiently; "but what the deuce brings — show her in here, Pyne."

"Drawing-room, Frank?"

"Here, I say," said the Master of the House.

"Perhaps she'd like some coffee, poor thing," said little Mrs. Beaumont, in a low tone. "I dare say they have not too much to eat."

Francis Beaumont was not exactly pleased at the visit, but this kindly speech of his little country wife was too much for him, and he fairly exploded, as Miss Gracie entered.

Perhaps Mrs. Beaumont would have liked to see a little more deference and respect in the actress's manner, but Alice was a just woman, and allowed that none of her lady-acquaintances could have come into a room more gracefully, apologised more properly for an untimely visit, and seated herself with a more felicitous arrangement of drapery.

"But then such people as my husband teach them to do it," thought the wife, and the husband would have exploded again if he had heard the notion.

"Mrs. Beaumont was saying, just as you came in," began Francis, "that —"

"My dear Frank," said his wife, colouring.

"Was just saying," persisted the husband, "that you would call this a stage breakfast-table; plenty of flowers, and china, and glasses, and nothing to eat."

But the fact is that we had finished. Will you let me order you some coffee—it will be here in a moment?"

Mr. Beaumont, you see, did not introduce the ladies, but he treated the acquaintance as matter of course. And, being a gentleman, he felt it right to explain his laugh at Miss Clare's entrance.

"Thanks, no," said Miss Clare. "I never take anything between breakfast and lunch."

"I should think not," observed Mrs. Beaumont to herself. "She would be a little pig if she did."

"Nothing wrong at the theatre, I hope?" said Mr. Beaumont. "I left everything straight, except Dido's song in the cave, which Vetch ought to have composed last night; he had loads of time to compose a song; but those musicians are so dilatory."

"He has sent it me, thank you. I should think that he had composed it on the top of his hat on the omnibus. It has a wonderful family likeness to a dozen old friends."

"Yes, it's heart-breaking work," said the author, very seriously, "to write for these men. They have no invention or originality. And the words are good, Fletcher took pains with them; they begin—"

"Will you come to the cave I have furnished for you?"

"But do you call that original, Frank?" asked Mrs. Beaumont.

"Eh? Well, yes, in a sense. Original enough for Vetch, anyhow, but he's a poor creature."

"As a musician, I suppose he is," said Miss Clare, "because all parts of the house like his songs, and I notice that when that is the case, the critics always

call a man a humbug. But he's not poor in another way, for he has just bought two more houses at Brompton."

"May they be haunted by the ghosts of the tunes he has stolen."

"That would be very pleasant," laughed Mrs. Beaumont. "Frank, your curse has turned it into a blessing."

"I must not trespass on your time, Mr. Beaumont [Mr. Beaumont. And she kissed him the other day], which I know is very valuable."

"That's a poke at my late breakfast; but I have been working for three hours, already, not without some reference to your interests, Miss Clare."

"But it is not about theatrical matters that I have intruded. I should have talked to you about them in the proper place. This is another thing altogether, and I am rather in a puzzle, and I wished to ask your advice."

"Somebody wants to marry her," thought Mrs. Beaumont, "but she has no business to come here about her affairs. I hope he will have nothing to say to it. I don't know, either," she added to herself, relentingly; "she's a pretty girl, and good, or he would not have let me stay in the room. Why shouldn't she marry, and be rescued from the degradation of the stage? She shall talk to him as long as she likes. I dare say," said the good little creature, aloud, "that you would like to talk by yourselves. And really, if Miss Clare would rather not have any coffee, you might take her into the drawing-room, Frank, I think."

[And why should not she see my pretty drawing-rooms, and learn what a *lady's* taste can do with furniture.

Of course, I don't care for her opinion, but — she may as well go in.]

"As you please, dear," said the Master of the House; and he conducted Miss Clare into the room in question, which, indeed, pretty Alice Beaumont had made very pretty indeed.

"What a Bower of Bliss," said Gracie. "I hope that Mrs. Beaumont does not think me impertinent for coming down in this way and forcing myself into her presence."

"Mrs. Beaumont is as pleased to see you as I am, Gracie; but what the deuce is the matter?"

"I had better blurt it all out straight, and you can comb it out afterwards," said Gracie, with some confusion of imagery. "I want your advice."

"Don't have him unless he rolls in gold."

"Tchee, it's nothing of that kind. Do you think I should come to you about that?"

"I don't know why you shouldn't. I'm as good as a father to you, I think. Didn't I stand by you at rehearsal, against manager, scene-painter, fiddler, and all, and insist on the song coming where we had agreed. And you to think me heartless!"

"You are not heartless. But you don't care about these things."

"What things?"

"Love nonsense and that. And why should you?" she added, looking round the rooms. "You are settled and happy, and can take the world coolly. Now, advise me coolly."

"Go on, Gracie."

"You know," she began with a lowered voice, "all about Ernest Dormer and Lucy. I was too busy mak-

ing a fool of myself at John Fletcher's the other day to say much, but I took notice. You held your tongue in an audible manner."

"A good phrase. Well, perhaps I did. The business is none of mine, and I rather like the man, and therefore I did not wish to hear anything that might put me in a false position with him. But avoiding a needless bother is one thing, and avoiding a friendly act is another. I believe that you will find I can make the distinction. What are you driving at? Speak out, Gracie."

"You know that he has engaged himself to be married to somebody, and that he has broken off with Lucy."

"I know the first, and, as he is a gentleman, I have a right to suppose the second. I am glad to hear it from you."

"Yes, that's the way, of course, to speak of it," said Gracie, bitterly. "Especially in a villa in Victoria Road. All right. I know. Never mind about that. We'll go on as if it was all right."

"Because it is all right."

"But it is not. Lucy loves him with all her heart, and he may go and marry twenty ladies in the country, but you'll find that he does not care for one of them half so much as he does for her."

"The experiment would be objectionable in many ways."

"Don't — don't. You understand me; don't pretend to not. And, you know all this just as well as I do. John Fletcher knows it, and you and he have no secrets. In fact, he as good as told me you did."

"He told you more than I ever told him then, but no matter. If it is so, what do you want done? This

poor Lucy, who is, I believe, a capital sort of girl, is your friend. Is Dormer not doing his duty in the way of settlement? He is not the person whom I should suspect of meanness."

"There you go again. Nothing but money. That's the golden ointment, warranted to cure everything, hearts included, and observe the government stamp."

"Well said. You shall say that to the public some day." And he made some marks in a note-book.

"It is nothing about money, Mr. Beaumont."

"Then what is it about, Miss Clare? Do you wish me to go to Mr. Dormer, and represent to him that his conduct in marrying is exceedingly unkind towards Lucy, and that he would do well to break off the match and return to the Hut?"

"If you did, I believe you would give him the best advice he ever had in this world. But ask you to do that? Not I. I know you all better. What I want to say is this. An excessively bad woman — a woman so bad that I can't tell you all about her, though you know I am not meek in the mouth — this woman is making enquiries after him. She pretends to want only Lucy's address, and caught me last night at the stage-door to get it from me, but, putting this and that together, I and mother are quite sure that she means something more."

"Did you give the woman the address?"

"Did I? I told her a lie that reached from the stage-door into Kent, and it should have reached into Kamschatka if it would have done Lucy any good, or done her any harm."

It is not absolutely necessary to record the process of cross-examination by which Francis Beaumont ob-

tained a sketch of Mrs. Faunt. At first Gracie would say as little as possible, beyond giving her earnest assurance of Mrs. Faunt's badness. But the author, being a man of the world, and in two respects, only, like Dr. Cantwell — a good man, who knew what impropriety meant — soon struck on the scent, and followed it up, for a minute. Then he said, frankly and kindly,

"My dear Gracie, I didn't want to pain or pester you, but it was necessary that I should understand. Now I understand perfectly, and we can go on without more explanations. This is a bad woman, but I don't see what harm she can do to Ernest Dormer."

"Which, of course, is all you are thinking about. But you are right, she can do no harm to Lucy, who has no plots and secrets, and thinks of nothing but Mr. Dormer and their children — dear little things — I don't know such sweet children."

"Poor things!"

"You may well say that, though I dare say many a duchess would give her ears to have such children. But I don't believe you are right about what I suspect. Naturally you think me a fool, and I suppose that you fancy my hatred for old Faunt makes me suspicious. Think all that and welcome. There's something in instinct; and I have an instinct that somehow, either through Lucy or not, there's mischief that may hurt your friend, and serve him right."

"You don't mean that, or you wouldn't be here."

"I do mean it in a way, and I don't. When I think about Lucy and her goodness, and her misery, I hate him. And then I think that men, who are all weak fools, except in mere business and that, are always

plunging into troubles for want of heart and honesty, and then I pity her. And, besides, he did behave exceedingly kind to me, and got me a puff that got me an excellent engagement, and when I think of that, I seem to like him. And so, if there's anything in the wind, and I can do him a good turn, I will, and mother may say what she likes."

"From which I gather that your worthy mother thinks you had better keep out of the affair?"

"Yes, she does, rather."

"Quite right. Give the wretch a wide berth. Well, Gracie, it seems to me that we are quite in the dark, and that any kind of interference would be about as absurd and Quixotic a business as one can well imagine. For Lucy, you say, you have no fears. The only way in which Ernest Dormer can come to any harm is this — and please to mark my words. If the connection is not fully and completely broken off, and if it is anybody's interest to be able to prove that — why, Dormer, if found out, will be in an awful scrape, and will richly deserve it. I, for one, would not put out a hand to save him. But, if you like, I will give him the benefit of the doubt — and, Gracie, I suspect you know how far there is any doubt at all, and whether he is not playing a foolish game — and I will tell him what sort of enquiries are being made. He can decide whether the address shall be given."

"I wanted to write to-day; but still —"

"Tchee — as you say — is it Chinese? — we'll do something. I want you to mind what your mother says, and keep away from this hag. But I will stave her off. Where does she live?"

"I was to write to a pastry-cook's. Here is the card."

"Leave it with me."

"And what will you do?"

"First, gain time. Secondly, worry the hag. Thirdly — we shall see. No wise man declares on three objects at a time."

"I believe that you are a good creature. I fully expected to be dismissed in the most polite manner, and to be assured that you really did not see your way to any meddling in the matter."

"And that's the answer you ought to have had. And that's the answer anybody will have ten years hence. But somehow, although I take great pains with myself, I can't quite get out of my bachelor habits, or forget how to spell the word lark. Yet I look grave enough, don't I?"

"Owls is flippant, comparingly."

"I'll do this, though, and tell you the news when I get any."

"Then I'll go. Francis, if there ever was a little lady, your wife is one. What does she care for your approval? says you. Which is true."

"You are quite right, Gracie. And I deserved a good wife, didn't I?"

"That's neither here nor there. Good-bye, Mr. Beaumont."

Mr. Beaumont, having dismissed his visitor, betook himself to his study. The world knows nothing of its greatest men. It was supposed by those who were acquainted with Mr. Beaumont's punctual habits in business matters, and who heard him cited as a model of orderliness and propriety, that this author's work-room was an elegant cabinet, in which all was neatness, and that he wiped his pens, laid away his litter in a covered

waste-basket, and never inked the pretty carpet. He himself fostered this idea, and we have heard him rebuke even John Fletcher for carelessness. But a man is a poor creature who is not a law to himself in some matters. Mr. Beaumont had a theory that a man should have a Den, somewhere in the world. And he had always in bachelor days contrived to have one, in which disorder, as it seemed, was supreme. His wife had fitted up and decorated the nicest little room for him, on the ground-floor of the villa, and used to put flowers there every day, and constantly adorn it with some feminine fancy. And, during the first months after their marriage, Mr. Beaumont consented to sit, arrayed in velvet and conjugal red slippers, a model of an elegant author-craftsman. During this time, while his chief business was to be ready with a smiling answer when a pretty face looked in and asked him how he was getting on and whether he wanted anything and whether he should soon have done, and while his attempts at work were somewhat interrupted by the great pains bestowed upon his whiskers by his admiring wife, the elegant little room answered its purpose very well. But later, when the young wife acquired more repose, and the young husband had to work harder, Mr. Beaumont suddenly moved himself upstairs into a garret, on which he had been casting a secret and resolute eye. Availing himself of a couple of days when his wife was visiting her parents, he basely brought to the refined villa a cart full of his old furniture from his bachelor chambers — a terribly stout, but hideously ugly table, a battered old desk which had borne up his manuscript from the time when he was struggling into magazines to the time when magazines were struggling for him, a

vast oak chest, filled with the memorials of years of an odd life, three or four prints in the wormiest of frames, and a huge arm-chair, which had once belonged to a monthly nurse. This pleasing assortment of goods Mr. Beaumont conveyed up into his garret, and dire was the astonishment of the little matron, when on her return, she found the graceful nest deserted, and the beloved bird perched in this strange roost. But she was too good a wife not to understand the fitness of things, and the Den became an institution. After a time, the loving Alice learned to like it better than any room in the house, and her happiest hours were spent in the huge, long, deep chair, reading, dozing, or working at some very small garment, while her husband's rapid pen was performing the satisfactory chemistry which turns ink into gold. No visitor was ever allowed here, and Francis Beaumont had once or twice ventured to impart a sort of wish that no servant might be permitted to enter, either, but Alice felt that the line must be drawn somewhere, and the duster was tolerated, rather growlingly, by the author. Here he worked, and well, and the nest was kept for the reception of literary or other clients, who, when they came by appointment, found Mr. Beaumont in the red and velvet, writing in the most elegant manner, and looking as a picturesque author would wish to look when painted for posterity.

"You must and shall see people in a room that is worthy of you, darling," Alice had said, holding on fast by his whiskers.

"Anything to please you, dearest," had been his dutiful reply. "And," he had added, for he was frank to transparency with those whom he loved, "it is the

right thing in a business point of view. Nothing like showing people that you can be prosperous without their help — they get delightfully ready to apply the moral of the ten talents, and give to the man who has got plenty.”

“Hush, dear,” said Alice Beaumont, who had been too well taught not to know better things. “That is not the moral of the ten talents — it means that we are to be diligent, and use our advantages, and do the best for ourselves.”

“Quite right, dear. I have done the best for myself, in marrying a wife who loves me too well to let me talk nonsense.”

“As if I could tell you anything you did not know! Only I thought you might have forgotten,” said Alice “and I am so very late from the school-room.”

It will be inferred that they understood one another, and that Mrs. Beaumont was not likely to ask more questions about Gracie Clare’s business than Francis Beaumont thought it well to answer. The little wife, however, was not long in following her husband up into his beloved garret, and in seating herself in the great chair. He was writing a note, and stopped two or three times, for reflection.

“Frank,” she said, “there’s some mischief in that note. Tell me about it, sir.”

“What makes you think that, Mrs. Beaumont?”

“Because I very seldom see you hesitate over a note. You are devising some wickedness. Tell me.”

“You don’t ask what Gracie Clare wanted.”

“Ask? Of course not. Isn’t it your duty and privilege to tell me everything without being asked. I wonder whether my guess was the right one?”

"Whatever it was, no."

"She is not going to be married?"

"I asked that, of course, though I don't know why she should come to me about any marriage, except her marriage to Æneas."

"What *do* you mean, Frank?"

"Didn't I tell you that Fletcher and I are writing the part of *Dido* for her in the next burlesque?"

"I forgot the marriage. I don't think it was mentioned in our school-book."

"A very sad omission, but never mind, dear."

"Ah, you are laughing at something. Tell me directly."

"Yes, while we are out — I suppose we are to go to Richmond, and I have sent round to order the brougham at three o'clock. Will that suit your ladyship?"

"It will suit her very well. But what did Gracie Clare come for?"

"See here, love. I can tell you all about it, but the story is quite uninteresting, and it could only be explained by some details which you may just as well not hear, simply because they relate to coarse and vicious people."

"Then don't tell me anything about it. But I am sorry that nice girl should be mixed up with such things."

"She is not, and is behaving particularly well. And there was something frank and simple in her coming to tell me about it. I have a sort of reputation for stern wisdom, so folks come to me for advice, and let me alone when there is nothing disagreeable to talk about."

"Do many folks come to you on such errands, Frank?" asked Mrs. Beaumont, laughing archly. "I mean folks like Miss Clare?"

"No, your Sauciness. This is my first consultation since our marriage."

"Do you charge any fees, sir?"

"I don't understand you," said Beaumont, pretending to be puzzled.

"Then I'll come round and make you understand pretty soon, as one of our governesses used to say, and we knew that the next moment a good slap was coming."

However he did not seem much frightened, and it is not upon record whether the punishment, or any other, was administered.

Mrs. Beaumont scarcely referred to the subject again. She cared about only two things in the world, at that time. One was her clever and devoted husband, and the other was something in the future, something which filled her home with a new and not untroubled joy. What were the squabbles and intrigues and worries of the world to her, as she laid her fair little head on her husband's shoulder, and they drove, almost in silence, to their country dinner. It is a happy time when a man and a woman can be long silent together, and love one another the better that neither speaks of love. A few years later, and silence is perhaps thought to mean either sorrow or sulks.

But before the husband wound his arm round Alice's waist, and finally settled down for that calm and happy drive, he posted a couple of letters. One of them was to the address given by Mrs. Faunt to Gracie. This letter was not in Mr. Beaumont's own writing. He

had called on a friend whose hand was not so well known as his own, and who further disguised his caligraphy, involuntarily, by the agitating aid of a slight attack of *delirium tremens*, and Frank got the note written almost before the writer understood what he was doing. Mr. Beaumont then gave his friend a brief but severe lecture on his absurdity in drinking and smoking too much at the same time, and affectionately implored him to stick to one excess only. The other letter was of some length and in his own hand. Then, with a tranquil mind, as became one who had served a good girl, given a friend sound advice, and prepared a plot to hurt the wicked, happy Frank Beaumont dismissed all thought but that of the sweet little wife nestling by his side. How very delightful life would be if we could always be at that date — always have been married a few months and be always going to have our first baby — being also able always to have a brougham and a Richmond dinner.

"I have nine minds and a little one in," good Mrs. Nobb had somewhat oracularly observed when she found the yellow card in the pocket of her sleeping child. "And I will, too," she had added, with determination. Which utterance shall be explained in narration.

Mrs. Nobb completed her preparations for dinner, for though the honest, hard-working green-groceress cared little for her own comforts, and on a busy day was quite content to snatch her own meal on her counter, or in the corner of her shop, (her business not lying among customers who would have fastidiously taken offence at her having to empty her mouth before she replied to their vegetarian enquiries,) she made a

sacred point of caring for the comforts of her daughter. When Jenny's repast was in question, Mrs. Nobb had slight hesitation, — or, in her own vernacular, made no bones — of leaving the shop to take care of itself, with such imperfect protection as it might derive from the superintendence of one of a long series of objectionable little girls accredited to her by the parochial authorities, and each of whom turned out to be more objectionable than her predecessor, especially in the way of stealing the fruit which she ought to have watched. To-day, Mrs. Nobb was much exercised by the profligacy of her subordinate, a young lady of thirteen, with a large connection among the street-boys, who benefited largely by her unprincipled liberality. Nevertheless, the dinner being well in hand, Mrs. Nobb dressed herself hastily, and securing the temporary services of a neighbour who owed her money, and who undertook to mind the shop, the matron went forth to do that which she had declared she would do.

Fortune, which favours the bold, was propitious to Mrs. Nobb, for she had not waited long in the pastry-cook's shop in Holborn, when the person whom she wished to see came in. Mrs. Nobb put down a half-eaten sausage-roll, and waited for a minute, with her back to the customer.

"Letter come for me yet, M'm," said the latter. "Name of Faunt?"

"There have not, M'm," said the mistress of the shop, coldly. She was a respectable woman, and somehow did not like the looks of the enquirer. Business, however, was business; and Mrs. Faunt had placed the matter on a pecuniary basis.

"Well, that is strange. I'll call again. Bad luck

now, better next time." To which promise and proverb the mistress of the shop made no reply, not having included anything of the sort in her bargain.

"I think I'll comfort myself with a sup of ratafee," said Mrs. Faunt.

She was served in silence. As she raised the glass to her lips, Mrs. Nobb turned round, and was instantly recognised.

"Well and a day!" exclaimed Mrs. Faunt, gushingly, "if this isn't better than good. Expecting a letter and beholding a friend! Before more words, you will do as I do, Mrs. Nobb? Another glass of ratafee, M'm, unless this lady puts a name to anything else."

"We have nothing else," said the shop-mistress, without rising.

"Nothing for me, M'm," said Mrs. Nobb, "not that I dare say it is not very good, I'm sure, but you will understand me when I say that I would rather you handed me poison, than any refreshment at the expense of this person, who is no friend of mine."

The woman looked rather more favourably at Mrs. Nobb, after this frank declaration, but made no further remark.

"If such are your sentiments, Mrs. Nobb," said Mrs. Faunt, "and why they should be is best known to yourself, I am at a loss, M'm, to know why you have been so good as to come here?"

"I suppose, M'm, that I may come into any shop which happens to be open, without saying with your leave or by your leave," returned Mrs. Nobb, who, like Dr. Johnson, was not inclined to let an antagonist have even the advantage of a stamp.

"Only remarking, M'm, that there is one shop in which it might be better for you to keep, which is a paltry little greengrocer's, not a hundred miles from Seven Dials, I wish you a good afternoon, and better manners."

"I want nothing of this kind here," said the pastry-cook.

"You are quite right, M'm," said Mrs. Nobb, who saw the business character of the protest; "and having paid for what I have not eaten, my appetite being took away by the sight of villany, I shall go away, advising you as a fellow-tradeswoman, though a stranger, to keep your eye on the spoon belonging to the brandy cherries."

"And this is gratitude from a woman whom I have sought to serve," said Mrs. Faunt, plaintively. It may be supposed that she would have answered in a different way, but that she did not want to quarrel outright with the shopwoman, and possibly miss a letter that might be on its way.

"Sought to serve, you wretched, vile, old viper!" said Mrs. Nobb. "If ever I get a chance to testify at the Old Bailey what sort of services you have been doing all through your wicked life, I only pray I mayn't have a sore throat to prevent me speaking out."

"I think you had better both leave the shop," said its mistress. "And here, M'm," she said to Mrs. Faunt, holding out what was apparently a coin in paper, "you had better take this back. I prefer taking in no letters. It isn't in the way of my business. Tom," she cried, down a trap-door.

"M'm," said a voice, and a flour-covered face came up, like a pantomime trick.

"Open the door for these ladies, and see them out."

"There's no necessity, M'm," said Mrs. Nobb. "The pleasure is to get away from the presence of obnoxious society. I wish you good morning, M'm, only remarking that if I have left my sausage-roll, it is not out of any dislike, for it began good, but the air in which that woman lives and moves is a disgrace to creation and a discredit to her sex."

With which climax, Mrs. Nobb, curtseying to the shopkeeper, went out. Her step showed some elation, and she was not long in reaching her own street. But she had not arrived at her door when she perceived a small crowd around it. The gathering was chiefly composed of boys, but three or four ill-favoured louts of seventeen or eighteen were there, and seemed to be inciting their younger companions to some act of vengeance.

Mrs. Nobb dashed through the crowd, and into her shop, where she was confronted by her debtor and neighbour, a tall, powerful, slatternly woman, who held a cane in her hand.

"Ah, Mrs. Nobb, I'm glad you've come back." But you'll find I've done my duty by you as friend and neighbour, and will again, please God, whenever required at my hands. I've saved your goods, M'm, and the sooner that young limb of the devil is handed to the police the better, Mrs. Nobb."

The person thus charitably described was the last of the series of girls recommended to Mrs. Nobb by an affectionate parish. The young person was crouching down in a corner, howling dismally.

"What's she crying for?" was kind Mrs. Nobb's first question.

"Crying you said, I think," said the avenging neighbour, brandishing the cane. "If I were mistress here, I'd give her something to cry for; but there's not a tear on them brazen, dirty, insolent cheeks. She's only howling with rage."

"I'll learn you to hit my brother!" yelled the alleged delinquent.

"Your brother? I daresay," replied the avenger. "I'd brother you, my girl, if I had you in a back yard with this cane for five minutes. You wouldn't be in a hurry to call in all the street black-guards to steal pears after that, I promise you."

The door was open, and the mob heard this unfavourable sketch of its character. Three or four impudent lads came, warily, upon the steps, but would not venture farther. Two or three cried,

"Shame! You let her alone, will yer."

The avenging curator of Mrs. Nobb's property made a rush at the speakers, and they darted back in dismay, but only to collect in groups and prepare for fresh demonstrations.

"I've marked some of their hides, Mrs. Nobb, and if they ever washed themselves, they wouldn't wash off those marks to-night. Lucky I came in when I did. You had not been gone five minutes. I put on my bonnet, and locked my door, and I saw five or six of them young thieves marching in as if they were young noblemen coming to buy pine-apples for the Queen. I only turned back to borrow this of Jim East, as happened to be using it on his own boy at the minute, and in I came among 'em. And there was that precious

girl, as is owling in hypocrisy, for I never touched her, handing over pears to one and another, and them calling her miss, mocking politeness like. I polited 'em, and polished 'em too, and I hope they like it."

"I always hate a disturbance," said Mrs. Nobb, "and I'd sooner lose a few pears than have a row, and stones through my window after dark — that's their way. If it had been your own shop, Mrs. Jarvis, you wouldn't have been so violent."

"She hit my little brother as had a penny and come to spend it," yowled the parochial young lady.

"May be so, but I hit a lot as were not your little brothers, and having no pennies could not come to spend any, you young cat. What do you say about your mistress's goods, you little faggot?"

"It were only two or three rotted pears, if you'll believe *me*, mum," said the accused, looking dismally at Mrs. Nobb.

"But she won't believe you," said the avenger, "because I saw better, and I'm ready to swear to it, and now I'm going for a policeman. Tell your story about your rotten little brother — I mean your little brother and your rotten pears — to the beak."

"Mercy, mum, mercy," observed rather than exclaimed the small sinner, who knew perfectly well that she was in no danger.

"You won't give my servant in charge without my leave, Mrs. Jarvis."

"Oh, very well, mum, I'm sure I thought I was acting the best for you, but one never knows whether one's obliging a party or not."

"I asked you to mind my shop, Mrs. Jarvis, not to lick boys."

"Oh, very well, mum. This is gratitude from a person one has tried to serve."

This was hard on Mrs. Nobb. It was the second time within an hour that she had been unjustly reproached with ingratitude, and she fairly lost her temper.

"Perhaps, if you'd be so good as to go back to your home, from which I'm sorry I asked you to stir, Mrs. Jarvis, we should get rid of that mob, which is keeping customers out of the shop."

The mob seemed to feel hurt that it received no more attention, and again gathered towards the steps, and again was heard the cry of "Shame!"

They had better have been silent. Mrs. Jarvis snatched up her cane, and as three bounds of Risinghame's noble charger brought him from the church-door to the side of Wyclif, whom he immediately slew, three strides of Mrs. Jarvis's long legs brought her from the shop door to the side of a long lout of eighteen, who was egging on his fellows. Sharp and bitter came the slash across the evil lout's face, and before the yell of pain which the coward set up had ceased, there was a long livid line over his ill-favoured features. He fell back, howling and crying, after the manner of the savage cowardly gang of whom he was a type, and on whom no agency which has yet been invented, save the bitter blow, has the least effect. Then did Mrs. Jarvis, in her wrath, turn upon the other rioters, and made such havoc and such hew with her rapid cane that the mob was completely routed by the charge of one determined woman. The amount of howl which that heroine got in two minutes out of that gang could only be realized by those who happen, in the course of

their London pilgrimage, to have witnessed the scene, when an angry woman takes a case into her own hands.

Mrs. Nobb was gratified neither as a lover of justice, nor as a plundered housekeeper. She was not of a vengeful nature, and she knew that the malice of the street would be wreaked upon her at some time when she should not be able to defend herself. And while Mrs. Jarvis was raging like Joan of Arc, and demolishing the unrighteous with sore strokes, Mrs. Nobb had no more spirit left than to say aloud, — —

“Drat the woman, I’d sooner the children had all the pears in the shop.”

“Mu—u—uther!” exclaimed Gracie, entering upon the premises. “Got up in glory too. What have you been doing?”

“O lord, Jenny, my dear,” gasped her parent, “the world’s at an end. But I’ve given somebody a piece of my mind, for speaking to an honest woman’s daughter.”

“O, bother, mother — you’ve spoiled some fun. Come up-stairs, you old thing, and let’s have it out.”

CHAPTER XVII.

Antenuptial.

WHILE others were busy, in their degrees, and with more or less earnestness, in the affairs of Ernest Dormer and Magdalen Conway, those persons, unconscious, of course, of the interest which their respective friends and enemies displayed in reference to the approaching marriage, were taking more serious thought for themselves and for their future.

Enough has been said of Magdalen’s self-communings to make it clear that in the ordinary sense of the

word the union which was meditated was no love-match. But, except in romance, there are not many love-matches. It is only the brevet of convention which gives that rank to the thousand desirable and fortunate marriages of which the lady relatives and friends of the parties habitually speak in terms which, if strictly construed, would justify the belief that were the affair broken off, the coroner and the convent would have to give an account of the broken-hearted pair. Young English people are very rational, and therefore middle-aged English people are reasonably happy, and old English people are tolerably content. Most marriages among the upper middle-class are as much controlled by circumstances, prudently considered, as lines of poetry are by their rhymes. It is to our credit that this is so. Marmaduke greatly admires Isabel's eyes and her pleasant voice, and should they marry, he would make her a capital husband, neither bringing tears into her pretty eyes nor sadness into her sweet voice, but he will not marry her, for he has aristocratic connections, and he has seen something of her vulgar family. Leonora has been much pleased with Harold's smartness and sparkle, and believes that there is something much better in him than either, and should they marry, she would make him a charming wife, and never snub him when he endeavoured to be lively at home, but she will not marry him, for one young man is not so much better than another as to make it worth her while to engage in a life-long quarrel with a set of venomous old sisters, who think that Harold ought to keep single and support them. But, if Isabel's family went to Australia, and Harold's sisters were where venomous old folks go, and the two matches were arranged, we know what we should hear.

"My dear, they are perfectly wrapped up in one another. I suppose we have all been foolish in our time, but I never saw anything like such devotion." And why should not such things be said? At least they recognise a something which ought to exist, and therefore are akin to certain other standards which we agree, especially on Sundays, to declare our own rule of life.

But Magdalen is going to marry Ernest, and therefore it is due to her to make a quiet protest against her being accused of being less in love with her affianced husband than is the case with the majority of our modest and affectionate young women. Magdalen likes him very much, is assured by him that he loves her, she has given her word, and her parents approve. Accident, as usual, introduced the young couple, circumstances exerted a benevolent influence, and as has been before asked, why should not the marriage be a happy one? At all events, the experiment is to be tried, and thousands of similar experiments result in producing that average of happiness which is found in English domestic life.

The absence of what is called romance — the word is used, young ladies, of course only for the sake of convenience, and not from any inability to appreciate the ideal — had one beneficial effect, if those who are at present in love will consider it so. Both Magdalen and Ernest were spared lovers' quarrels, and the inquietudes which lead to those demonstrations, or which are unwholesomely suppressed. Whatever cares Magdalen might feel in connection with the intended union arose from herself and certain principles of her own — it had nothing to do with Ernest Dormer. Of his history she knew very little, of his inner nature nothing

at all, but he was externally all that a well brought-up young lady could desire — tender, attentive, respectful, but ready at a second's notice, and at fitting time and place, with at least as much demonstration as was becoming. He showed perfect tact, he never said or did aught to bring a mirthful eye upon his *fiancée*, but he made her constantly conscious of his devotion. It may be, even, that could a stranger and a man of the world have observed Dormer's courtship, that inspector would perhaps have privately regarded Ernest as somewhat in excess with his sedulousness to please, and in a man-of-the-worldly spirit would have drawn certain inferences to which it is not necessary to advert, as these lights and shades are for the initiate only, and the initiate hold their tongues. But Magdalen could see nothing except a lover whose sole thought seemed to be that he might appreciate her lightest word, forestal her slightest wish, and convince her how worthy he was of her love. And as for Ernest Dormer, when he was in Magdalen's presence, he could not but be charmed with her grace, intellect, and simplicity, and when he was not in her presence — and he had to be in town a good deal before the marriage — he could never think of her without admiration, and let it be hoped that he thought of her as much as he should have done, and also in the way he should have done. They had therefore no opportunities for any little jealousies or misunderstandings, it was foreign to Magdalen's nature to create anything of the kind, and it will easily be understood that Ernest was not likely to ruffle the still lake of happiness.

Therefore, without venturing prematurely into the inner circle of the nature of either of the lovers, we announce that they are preparing for their marriage,

and that friends on each side are fulfilling their portion of the arrangements. Mrs. Conway is very happy indeed. She has superintended the alterations which it was thought necessary to make in the house at Naybury, and having at length got rid of bricklayers and carpenters, is engaged in furnishing the pretty suite of rooms destined for Magdalen and her husband. When one's mother-in-law does like you, she likes you with all her might, and rejoices to renew, for your sake, her motherly and silent thoughtfulness. Mrs. Conway determined that Ernest should be as happy as she could make him, and she called in her William's counsel to devise all sorts of contrivances for Dormer's comfort and convenience. The retired architect, after a few sniffs and shrugs at having to stoop to details somewhat beneath the dignity of his haughty vocation, broke into a genial laugh at some of the tiny devices which he was required to suggest, and then threw himself heart and soul into the work, and perfectly astounded the workmen with the fertility of his resources, and the clearness with which he taught them their own trade. It was a sort of diploma in the after-days for a Naybury artisan to be able to say that he had worked under Mr. Conway's eye. Specially, as Ernest Dormer was a sort of author, the Conways made for him the most delightful library, on the first floor, and looking out upon the greenery of the garden, and Mr. Conway's skill in devising doors that should exclude all noise (Mrs. Conway reminded him that there might, at some time, be various noises in the mansion, and Mr. Conway pretended dismay), and windows that should let in the best light, book-cases that should hold all sorts of volumes, and closets

that should enable the apartment to be kept neat, was exerted with remarkable effect. Then he plundered his own book-room, and placed a choice collection of books in the chamber of his intended son-in-law, carefully omitting most of the volumes of which it is said that no gentleman's library can be complete without them. Mrs. Conway saw to the other furniture, and especially to an easy-chair, so luxurious that only a tender mother could believe it possible for a man to sit in it and work, and to a lamp so beautiful that it seemed a delight to be one of its slaves.

"Ernest said that he had rather a pleasant working-room, William; but I don't think that he will complain of the change," observed Mrs. Conway, one day, when she had set flowers about the new library, and was casting a vigilant eye around to spy whether any addition to the prettiness of the room were possible.

"This is not the sort of room to work in," said Mr. Conway, by way of revenging himself for having done all in his power to make it delightful. "Some bare walls, with a few maps, an old table for your reference books, and a wooden chair as hard as you can buy him, and then a fellow gets to work in earnest. He'll lounge here, and smoke, and talk to his wife, and you will order them up lunch that the engrossed student may not be disturbed in his meditations."

"Well, dear, they will be happy in their own way, and that is the only way to be happy in this world."

"I know nothing about that. It was never permitted to me."

"And you are an old story-teller. There is not a

happier old man in all England, except when you begin to imagine troubles and grievances."

"Not much need of the Productive Logos for that," murmured Mr. Conway; but as his wife heard two words which he knew she did not understand, she wisely opined that the remark required no answer from her. The next speech she heard was more to the purpose.

"O, what a darling room!"

So spoke Magdalen, clapping her hands as she entered.

"Does it please you, Miss?" said her father, gazing affectionately at the beautiful girl.

"It is perfect, papa; and you are forgiven for not allowing me to see it until now, and there is a sign that you are forgiven," she added, kissing him. "And don't you be jealous, dear," she said, clasping her mother round the shoulders, and repeating the ceremony. "I see your hand everywhere, flowers and all. How you have both been thinking about him!"

"Well, I hope he will like it," said Mr. Conway.

"Why, papa, you speak as if it were possible that he should not. If he likes it only a quarter as much as I do, you will never get him out of it. And books, too! Have you been buying them? Here are some I never saw before."

"No, I have bought none, lately," said Mr. Conway. "I have looked out a few which I had stored away, as not likely to be much appreciated by my neighbours here, except perhaps the Rector of Saxbury."

"I should not think much of books that he would like," said Mrs. Conway, who was a very womanly woman, be it said to her credit.

"O, but he is a learned man, mamma, whether we like him or not."

"May be so, my dear. But I should not set him to choose a library for me."

"The books are very choice, my dear Mary," said Mr. Conway, smiling.

"And they are all right, William dear, I know that, and I don't want Mr. Grafton's approbation of them."

And if you like Mary Conway, or any other woman, the less, for a little feminine spirit like that, please to shut up this book, and send for a goody-goody novel, of genteel but Christian principles, and be told to eschew little sins, and never to allow even a justifiable dislike for a person's character to permit you to do injustice to his attainments. We apologise for our inability to introduce you to anything but flesh and blood.

"Mamma," exclaimed Magdalen, after an admiring examination of the room, "where did you get that stained glass over the windows?"

"Do you like it?"

"More than like it, dear," said Magdalen, gravely.

"Yes," said Mr. Conway, as he heard the tone in which his child spoke. The word was addressed to himself. He had a habit of replying in this way — of acknowledging something which he had not said, but had thought. It sounded oddly to common-place persons, and they avenged themselves, after their fashion, for being puzzled, by saying that he was a little cracked. It might not be amiss for a philosopher to select friends, as we do china, on the ground of that assertion. The chances are that he would get valuable specimens.

Magdalen understood her father.

"Yes, papa," she repeated, gently.

"Mamma ordered the glass, my dear," he said, taking down an Elzevir Plautus, and removing some specks from the vellum binding.

"But mamma has no other merit in the matter," said Mrs. Conway, unconscious of the under-play. "The pattern, or whatever you call it, was the one you brought from Wales, dear, and seemed to admire so much."

"And is it not beautiful? I declare that this glass is quite as fine as the original from which I sketched it."

"In a private chapel, I think, Magdalen," said her father.

"Yes, dear, Mr. Haslop's chapel; or, to speak more properly, the chapel Mr. Haslop built."

"Speaking as an architect, I only mean that I should not have chosen a chapel-window design for a domestic library," said Mr. Conway, "any more than I should take this Plautus to church instead of a Prayer-book. But as you are pleased, my love, we will let architecture take its chance."

"Now is not that like your papa?" said Mrs. Conway, a little vexed. "After working for weeks, and so hard, to make the room all that it should be, he wants to set you against it."

"He means nothing of the kind, mamma dear. He knows that you could not have pleased us so much as by giving us those windows. You do know that, papa?"

"I do know it," said Mr. Conway, replacing the book like a true lover of books, that is, carefully hold-

ing up the stamped leather of the shelf, inserting the volume tenderly, and gently dressing the row into a perfect level. "And I do not care what Naybury critics may say about that solecism."

Mrs. Conway, interested in all that concerned the room, looked about for the article he had last mentioned, but not being able to assure herself that she saw it, met the situation neatly.

"I should think not. Critics in Naybury indeed! I don't believe that three people in Naybury knew the style of their own church until your papa explained it to them, and if he had said that it was horizontal instead of perpendicular they would have known no better. Don't laugh at me, Mrs. Dormer, if you please — you see I know something," added Mrs. Conway, herself laughing.

"Those are remains of the wise words mamma got up when she was courting me, my dear," said Mr. Conway. "And now, young lady, you may be supposed to know a certain gentleman's tastes better than we can do. Is there anything else that occurs to you, and can this room or any of the rooms be improved for you? Speak now, or for ever hereafter hold your peace, to quote words which you may hear again one of these days."

"I can see nothing to alter, nothing to improve, papa dear. I only wish that Ernest were here to thank you."

"We will have no thanks, darling. We owe him some consideration for his giving up London life and society to come and settle in this dull town."

"Indeed," said Magdalen, drawing herself up with the prettiest affectation of wounded dignity.

"O, a million pardons," said her father, laughing. "I don't say that he is not to be rewarded. But after all, and making full allowance for the reward, it was very kindly and gracefully done, that assent to live here, without even making a condition."

"I have no patience with you, William," said Mrs. Conway.

"Certainly not, Mary," replied Mr. Conway, placidly. "But why advance that indisputable proposition?"

"I mean that I hope you will not begin to put into Ernest's head that he is making a magnificent sacrifice. Everything in the world that he can desire, and a good little wife into the bargain, and he is to be pitied, forsooth, because he comes out of dirty, smoky London to live a healthy and happy life in a country house. He ought to be very grateful, dear fellow, and what is more, I believe that he is."

"And I am sure of it," said Magdalen, "for he has told me so."

"That settles the question," said Mr. Conway. "And have you and he and your bellicose mamma there settled another question. Who is to perform the ceremonial? Mumble Plum?"

"How can we help it, William?"

"Well, I don't know, unless you like to take a secular view of the matter, and be united at the hymeneal desk of my little friend the registrar of births, deaths, and marriages."

Magdalen's serious look at her father was understood by him, but not by her mother, who merely saw a girl's expression of distaste at the idea of not being married in church.

"Of course that is impossible," continued Mr. Conway. "Mrs. Bulliman would be down upon us at the head of her regiment of Dorcasians, and sweep us into church. And one would not wound the feelings even of Mumble Plum. But I suppose he will be assisted by somebody else?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Conway. "It is not as if we were going to have a great wedding. I shall try to be as quiet as we can."

"Consistently with covers laid for five-and-twenty," said Mr. Conway.

"My dear William, we ask nobody whom we could at all leave out, and as it is, I know that we shall give offence, but the room will not hold more, and there's an end of it."

"And that explains the quietness," said Mr. Conway. "But I did not want to be quiet. We don't have a wedding in the family every day, and if you had only proposed a pavilion in the garden and a breakfast and servants from London, I should have been delighted."

"You have taken good care not to say so," said Mrs. Conway, laughing, "until you know it is too late for anything of the sort. No, we must keep to our humble twenty-five, or perhaps two or three more. Ernest does not ask many."

"How many?"

"Only five, papa. His uncle and aunt, the Stepneys, you know, Mr. Mangles, the literary gentleman with whom he is connected, and two other friends."

"I want to meet Mr. Mangles. I shall try to give him a few lights, of which he or his architectural writers are terribly in need. And the odd twenty are

attached and devoted friends of our own. How rich we are. Mamma and your aged sire, and the bride, three, and the parson, four, and my lawyer, five — now for the remaining fifteen?"

"Papa pretended not to care anything about it," said Mrs. Conway, "and now I will wager that he wants to know the dresses of the bridesmaids."

"He deserves to know everything," said Magdalen, "and he shall. Count, papa. There are four bridesmaids, I will tell you their names presently."

"Eleven left. Now for the All Naybury Eleven!"

"Don't laugh. Mr. and Mrs. Bulliman."

"I certainly see nothing to laugh at yet."

"Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw."

"Highly approved. I love Mrs. Fanshaw. When she doesn't understand anything, which is frequently, she asks, not because she wants to know, but because she thinks you would like to tell her, and that is altogether a nobler motive. Let her sit by me."

"That can't be, William. Leave all that to us. Go on, dear, and satisfy your curious papa."

"The Archdeacon and Mrs. Lincoln."

"Highly approved. Not for themselves, for he is a bore, but you wanted an imposing presence to frown down and crush Mrs. Bulliman. Confess, Mary."

"That was not the only reason," said Mrs. Conway, smiling. "What am I saying? We don't ask people to weddings for such reasons as that. In fact it was not the reason at all."

"No? Perhaps. But then a more secular one remains, whereof more anon. If you had only wanted to suppress my dear friend Mrs. Bulliman, you could

have found material nearer at hand. Old Mr. Grafton has twice the power of the Archdeacon."

"We ask him," said Mrs. Conway.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Conway, fairly and hugely astonished. "You ask the Rector of Saxbury!"

"Certainly, and his wife, and Edward Grafton, if he will come."

The way in which Mr. Conway, striding to the window, began muttering and mumbling over scraps of Latin and Greek, and perhaps half a dozen other languages, all such fragments being expressive of wonder, and contempt, and the like, was remarkable. During this performance the ladies remained silent. The litany, or commination, lasted some time, and when it seemed to be ended, a few supplementary fits broke forth, and, finally, Mr. Conway completed his task in a workmanlike manner, clenching the business with a hearty laugh. His mind being thus relieved, he turned to his wife and daughter, and said very gravely,

"Would it not be well to ask the Rector, or Edward, or both, to assist in the service?"

"Certainly not," said Mary Conway. "We may have very good reasons, dear, for wishing them to be present, or at least for inviting them ——"

"I observe the distinction."

"But that is quite another thing from asking either Mr. Grafton or his son to profane a solemn matter, like the marriage service read over our child. I would sooner that we had no guests at all, and that we four went into church, and saw no one but the vicar and the clerk, than that either of the Graftons should come inside the altar rails on that day."

Magdalen had seated herself in the large chair, and was listening, silently, to the conversation.

"You feel as your mother does, my love?" asked Mr. Conway, very tenderly.

"Let her speak for me, papa."

"Then," said Mr. Conway, "it seems necessary that I should tell you something of which, perhaps, you would not have heard — Magdalen at all events should not — until some future time. I should have answered a letter which I have received, and there would have been an end for the present. But your decision to ask the Graftons, and what you, dear Mary, have just said, leave me no choice. I have a letter from Edward Grafton, asking to be allowed to assist in the service."

Magdalen looked up, with a deep flush on her fair face, but she did not speak. Mrs. Conway's heightened colour simply indicated her honest anger.

"He either means an insult," she said, "or he is a contemptible creature."

"He would be the second," said Mr. Conway, quietly, "if he meant the first. But I have reason to think that we should wrong him if we believed either. Hear his letter.

"SAXBURY RECTORY.

"MY DEAR SIR,

"I am about to ask a favour at the hands of your family, and though I address myself to you as its head, I beg that my request may be submitted to Mrs. and Miss Conway.

"Let me abstain from all references to the past, known and unknown to you, and let me say only that I bear in mind, and ever shall, great kindness received

by myself, and that I accuse myself of much which it is a penance to remember, and for which it is a duty to atone.

“‘How far I may ever succeed in effacing certain impressions which I would give the world to obliterate, I know not, but you, and Mrs. Conway, and your daughter will but too well understand that what I am about to propose could be offered by me only under feelings which convince me that I am in solemn earnest in my endeavour to deserve other regards from you all than those which you now entertain.

“‘I will not enter into unwelcome detail, but in the assurance that I shall be justly, in the hope that I shall be kindly judged, I earnestly beg that I may be honoured with permission to bear a part, be it ever so slight, in the performance of the service at the marriage of Mr. Dormer with Miss Conway. I shall not be found ungrateful.

“‘With the kindest and most respectful remembrances to your family, believe me,

“‘My dear Sir,

“‘Yours most faithfully,

“‘EDWARD GRAFTON.

“‘WILLIAM CONWAY, Esq.’”

“William, I should like to answer that letter,” said Mrs. Conway.

“Yes?” asked her husband, with some little surprise, for though his wife could write a good, straightforward epistle at need, it was chiefly remarkable for going direct to the point, and for not leaving out the one word, date, or figure, on which the message depended. She was not fond of writing, and for what

may be called the floral part of the art she had anything but aptitude.

"Yes," she said. "I know what you mean. You think that this note, with its elaborate sentences (which I dare say he wrote nineteen times over before he pleased himself), requires an elaborate answer, just such a one as you would like to compose. But I should prefer to give him a piece of my mind."

"I make no doubt of it. But before we settle that, let me ask you whether there is not some inconsistency in your conduct, my dear. If it was worth while to seek to please the Graftons by asking them to our wedding, is it worth while to affront and enrage them by the very uncompromising despatch of which I see you are mentally arranging the opening slash?"

"I don't believe that his father and mother know that he has made the request."

"They will know that he has had a letter from you which makes it impossible for him to come to the breakfast."

"But I don't know that it will. If there is any good feeling left in him he will humble himself, and come to show that he is sensible of the rebuke."

"Mary," said Mr. Conway, smiling, "you convince me that you have some mystic reasons for wishing the Graftons here, and that you do not ask them out of mere respect for clergymen and neighbours. I don't want to pry into your secrets."

"They are mostly very harmless ones, dear."

"Yes. But unless you have a very strong desire to answer this young man, it really seems to me that the reply should come from the person to whom the note is addressed."

"It is addressed to us all."

"I lower my arms. Have your own way, as usual."

"As if I ever got it! But I do wish to write."

"And refuse, of course?"

"Of course."

"And accept, dear mamma," said Magdalen, joining for the first time in the conversation, and speaking in a pleading voice.

"Magdalen! Accept? *You* wish Edward Grafton to assist at your marriage?"

"Yes, mamma, if it will not be very unpleasant to you."

"My dearest child, you can be in no doubt about that, after what you have heard me say just now. I cannot in the least understand what you mean by wishing such a thing. Can you, papa?"

"Perhaps I have a glimpse of Maggie's meaning," said Mr. Conway, "but I am sure she prefers to explain it herself."

"Would mamma say why she so much objects to Edward Grafton's assisting?"

"Why, my dear, of course I will. But you know why. I think that he is a bad kind of man. I think that he is revengeful and mean, and I am not telling you any news, Magdalen, in saying that he has spoken of Ernest in a way that I would never have forgiven, had such things been said of your papa in my young days."

"I know all that, mamma, and even more. I would not vex you at the time, by repeating to you what Edward Grafton said about Ernest to me one day, when we met at one of the cottages, but I may tell

you now. He told me his ill opinion of Ernest, and dared to warn me against marrying him."

"I always hated your going to those cottages," said Mrs. Conway, sharply.

Of course that was not at all the answer which she wanted to make, and she had a great mind to scold Magdalen well for having kept this secret, but the truth was that she loved Maggie so very heartily, that she forced herself to talk nonsense, which she knew to be nonsense, rather than say what would have brought tears to Magdalen's eyes. Perhaps many a mother has submitted to this kind of self-humiliation out of her dear love for her child, and has never had credit for it. But in this case forbearance was rewarded, for Magdalen immediately threw her arms round her mother's neck, and, kissing her passionately, said, "Don't, you dearest. Don't keep it back. Scold me, if you like. But indeed I did not mean to give you pain."

"I know that, love," said her mother, returning the kiss, and wiping her eyes. "But if you *had* told me, he should never have had a chance of writing such a letter as that."

"Then you forgive me?"

"Why, I was never angry with you, dearest."

"Don't tell a story, dear," whispered Magdalen, playfully. "You were angry, just for a moment, and I deserved it. But you will show that you have forgiven me by telling Edward Grafton that he may come as he wishes."

"I cannot understand you, Magdalen," said her mother, "and it is of no use my saying the same thing over again. What *do* you mean by wishing to invite

the man who has insulted both you and your intended husband?"

"He has done both, mamma. He confesses that he has behaved ill, and that he repents it, and he has to make compensation by doing what — what," she said, smiling but colouring, "we all know must be very painful to him. It is our duty not to refuse to let him make amends."

These last words were said with a delightful seriousness, and they seemed rather like some one else's language than the speaker's.

"That is some of the Catholic nons — well, doctrine you learned in Wales, Magdalen," said her mother, "and it is one of the regrets of my life that you ever went there — not that you caused it, dear, for it was my fault for sending you. But I did not think that you would have remembered that sort of thing upon so serious an occasion as your marriage."

"Viewed as she views it," said Mr. Conway, gravely, "no time could be so fit for remembering it, mamma."

"Come, William," said Mrs. Conway, who was slightly disturbed, and not unreasonably felt that she had a right to make her husband share the disturbance, "that is nonsense from you. I would not use the word to Maggie, because she is in earnest, and I am sorry for it; but for you to begin preaching compensation and forgiveness as a Christian duty is a little too good. Nobody turns up their nose at such talk more than you do."

He was too good a husband and too gallant a gentleman not to receive the fire with perfect good humour.

"Dear Mary, I am the last person to preach, and I would never even hear preaching if you did not take me to church. I only want you to be just to Magdalen."

"Am I in the habit of being unjust to her?"

"No, mamma," answered the girl. "But I think that just now, you are inclined to be ever so little unjust to papa, who only spoke in kindness."

"I know that, too," said Mrs. Conway, whose burst of quick temper was over in a moment, and whose kindly nature at once began to make her angry with herself. "Papa don't mind what I say, an old heathen, nor do you either, Miss. And if you both join against me in this matter, of course I must give way."

"Not against you, but with you, dear," said Magdalen, "for I am quite sure that you understand me, and why I think it ought to be."

"I won't be coaxed," said Mary Conway, who liked nothing better in the world. "I give in, and there is an end, unless your father has anything to say, as becomes the head of the family, as Mr. Edward Grafton is good enough to call him. A pretty family it would be if there were no better head," she added, saucily. "Can't you speak, head of the family?"

"I think," said Mr. Conway, "that it is a matter in which Magdalen may reasonably be allowed to have her own way. I do not care in the least about Edward Grafton, and if Magdalen had told me of his conduct to her, I should have gone over to Saxbury and given that young priest an old man's mind, not perhaps in the style that you, Mary, were about to adopt, but still with sufficing emphasis."

"Yes, you can say bitter things when you like, and you put them in a way that makes them remembered."

"You have none to remember, at any rate."

"Perhaps."

"None, I say, and you know it. But I have two things to observe to you. As to the having Edward Grafton, after his insolence, I must say, my dear Magdalen, with all deference — nay, we will call it reverence, for the convictions that make you urge it, the concession is really so very — well, so outrageously amiable that one hardly knows how to speak of it. You know that though I have my own ideas, I never undervalued Christian teaching, and I don't deny that, logically, I am nowhere, if you plead certain rules of conduct. But we live in the world, and it is the nineteenth century, and if a man strikes you on the one cheek, we find that on the whole it rather answers better to return the compliment than to offer him the other. Don't you think that we had better set no example of preternatural piety — it might make people talk, and perhaps laugh?"

"Papa, you must not be angry."

"Do I speak as if it were likely, Miss Goneril Regan Conway?"

"If you do not wish what I wish, I ask you to say that it shall not be, and your command finishes everything. But please do not ask me — you know I can't mean anything disrespectful — please don't ask me to yield to such reasons as you have been giving. I am sure you are not serious in that."

"If you understand me, my dear, I think you will own that I have given you a hint at some good worldly

reasons for not being so exceedingly forgiving. But," he added, his better nature and his clear intellect coming up in Magdalen's aid, "I don't care for the world or for what any one may say. There. If you, dear child, would be made happier by this curious concession, and your mother assents, Edward Grafton shall come, if all Naybury laughs. And perhaps" — here a man's cowardice came back again — "there are not many people who know that we ought to hate him."

"Some do," said Mrs. Conway, colouring.

"I see," said her husband, laughing. "We have talked. Never mind. The risk shall be run. But I told you I had another thing to say. There is one person who ought to be consulted in this, and who certainly ought not to be married by a man whom he would probably kick, were Grafton not in orders."

"I am sure of Ernest's approval," said Magdalen. And she looked like one who might be pretty sure that anything she desired would be granted by a lover.

"I dare say, Pride and Arrogance," said her father, smiling. "But this is rather a man's question, after all, dear girl. You will be placing Ernest in a false position by calling in a person who has done him wrong. Come, you must consider that, Maggie. There is no hurry about answering the letter — he ought to be thankful if it is answered at all. The only condition we'll make with you, pet, is that you obtain Ernest Dormer's assent. That is surely right, mamma."

"Surely," said Mrs. Conway. "The only thing

is — O, I wish you had not these views, Magdalen," she added, in vexation.

"We won't re-open that question," said Mr. Conway.

"No. But what I mean is this. Magdalen cannot ask Ernest's consent without telling him every jot and tittle of Edward Grafton's conduct —"

"I have done so already, mamma. Was it not my duty?"

"And how did he receive it?" asked the mother.

"He used language so like papa's that it is quite curious."

"Not so curious, dear," said Mr. Conway, "because there is but one way of looking at such things. He said, I suppose, that he was sorry Mr. Grafton was a clergyman, because it is hardly the thing, except in extraordinary circumstances, to chastise a clergyman personally, but that he would take care to punish him somehow."

"He did not use the threat. I think Ernest never threatens. But I was afraid that he meant vengeance. He does not mean it now."

"What, child? Have you converted Ernest Dormer to your doctrines of charity and forgiveness?"

"I hope," said Magdalen, simply, "that he sees many things as I do."

"I have no more to say," said her father, gravely.

"You are bound, dear, to ask the question of Ernest. When you have his reply, I will write what you may dictate."

"Then I will go and write to him at once," said Magdalen, "and tell him all about this lovely room, and the pains you have taken with it, and the con-

viction you both have that he will write something here so wonderful that people will come from all parts to look at the house that holds the great author."

Her merry laugh lingered on their loving ears for a moment after she had vanished.

"Why do you look so grave, William?"

"Does nothing occur to you after what she last said? I don't mean the fun, but what she said as to his seeing things as she does?"

"Yes, it occurs to me that he is desperately in love. Is there anything wonderful in that, or terrible? What troubles you now, my dear old croak?"

"There is nothing wonderful in his loving that darling. But when a man of the world suddenly abandons the world's habits of thought, and gets to forgiving enemies and foregoing his right to punish them, one of two cases seems to arise."

"Well?"

"He is either a fool or a hypocrite."

"There you go. If it is possible to find a wrong in the pleasantest and most natural thing, my dear old William is the person to do it. Fool we know Ernest Dormer is not. Hypocrite, perhaps, in the sense in which all men are hypocrites when they are in love, and when they are ready to give up all their own ideas and feelings to please somebody else. I don't say that you ever did — you never loved me well enough. But I can quite understand Ernest doing so, or pretending to do so, in answer, I dare say, to a very sweet letter in which she laid her heart before him, and showed him how earnest she was in wishing him to forgive. He has not forgiven Edward a bit — I should despise him if he had, but his first duty was

to make Maggie happy. What do you know about love and lovers, dear?"

"More than you think. Enough to be quite ready to trust in your womanly instinct in such matters rather than to my own judgment."

"That's not so badly said, William."

"But just bear with me, dear, while I put one thought before you."

"I had rather not, if it is another miserable view."

"Listen. Ernest Dormer has been singularly ready to consent to all and everything that we wished. He consented to live at Naybury. He has assented to every proposition of our lawyer. He has given up the continental marriage tour, and will go to the Highlands. Nothing that he does not agree to."

"Nothing, and he is a dear fellow."

"I like him much, and I can understand your liking him to excess. But this wonderful willingness to do all we ask, to exert no will of his own —"

"Because he loves your child so much. You love her, too, and it is very odd that you cannot comprehend her fascination for him."

"He is not very young."

"What are you driving at, William? Speak out, that I may knock down another of your brain-spiders and scrunch it."

"Mary, if that man has made the girl believe that he shares her views, he is an accomplished hypocrite, and his object is to have this marriage carried out at any price."

"I do not think," said Mrs. Conway, much hurt, "that I ever knew you so cruelly unjust. How can

you talk so of a man to whom we are going to give all we love in the world?"

And she hastily left the room, with tears in her eyes.

"I may be a fool," said Mr. Conway. "I hope I am."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Mr. Mangles's Report.

THERE was great and high debate in the tobacco-parliament of the Octagon.

"Saw the marriage in the *Times* this morning?" asked Jimmy Rydon, not of anybody in particular, for he was squinting with both eyes at the fire in his meer-schaum, but he knew that he was pretty sure of an answer from somebody.

"Yes," said Tom Alford, "and I thought they might as well have borrowed a word from the list above, and said 'prematurely.'"

"What for?" said somebody.

"Why, the united ages can't make thirty-eight," said Alford.

"Tom, have you been dining?" asked Marsden.

"Course I have, and very badly. I have backed my bill, and if the committee don't attend to me, there'll be a row."

"All right," said Marsden, "but you needn't talk nonsense. If the united ages can't make thirty-eight, the bride must be under six years old, for Dormer is thirty-two."

"Oh, Dormer!" said Tom Alford.

"He never knows anything," remarked Henry Mil-

warden, "but he gets on so well without knowing anything that it would be a folly in him to be wise."

"I meant little Hugh Bristow's marriage," said Tom Alford, placidly.

"Who cares about little Hugh Bristow? He said he was off into the country, and he had a shiny black sort of pocket by his side. I thought the holidays were over, and he was going back to Uppingham. The idea of that brat marrying," said Rydon. "But I meant Ernest Dormer, of course, as would have occurred to anybody but Tom Alford."

"Yes, Dormer is married," said Henry Wigram, sententiously.

"Well! I hope he'll be happy," said Doddy Dalston.

"And it's very kind in you, Doddy," said Milwarden.

"And if ever you marry, and I hear of it, I will say the same about you."

"I see," said Dick Marsden, "that, as usual, one parson was not thought strong enough for the work, and that he was 'assisted.'"

"Yes," said Wigram, "and did you notice by whom?"

"Don't think I did, particularly."

"Why, by that man who dined with us here, and got so blessed buffy that he talked about his children's souls."

"That man Grafton?" said two or three.

"That identical and idiotic individual," said Wigram.

"He is not an idiot," said Charley Launceston, quickly, "nor in the least like one. He may be a great deal worse, but he's not that. Milwarden does not think him an idiot, I'll bet."

"No, by Jove," said the young barrister. "That outburst of his, which gave Tom Alford, for the first

time, a notion that some people believe they have souls, need not count. It was only a speech out of place. But I had the honour of sitting near that gentleman during part of the evening, and I can tell you that I know him to be a very clever fellow, and I believe him to be anything but a good one."

"I am awfully astonished at his assisting at the wedding," said Wigram, "after what I heard you tell Mangles, Charley."

"Well, you see," said Mr. Launceston, "Mangles knows what he is about, and all that. I infer that he used his discretion, and not his tongue. Besides, there may be family reasons — But here's the great Samuel himself — we'll hear what he has to say."

"Get into the box, Samuel Mangles, take the book in your right hand, and swear," said Milwarden, making a place for the chair, which Mr. Mangles drew between the speaker and Charles Launceston. "And now tell us. Were you at the Dormer-cum-Conway wedding?"

"I were."

"Well, and how did it go off? Use your own language, my good man, if you think you can make yourself better understood by the jury."

"One would think that you had no briefs by your incessantly talking shop, Henry, but as the papers show that many clients have the misfortune to employ you, I think you might leave off advertising your trade," said Mangles. He said this sort of thing in such a pleasant, fatherly way, half laughing, that offence would have been out of the question, even if an Octagon man, of that clique, had not been far too good a fellow to resent chaff.

"Tell us about the wedding," persisted Henry Milwarden, without the least notice of his friend's advice.

"Well, what do you want to know? One wedding is a good deal like another."

"Is she nice?"

"Nice! By Jove," said Mr. Mangles, solemnly, "Mrs. Ernest Dormer is the most charming young female I ever saw in all my life. You don't often see me in the seventh heaven about anything. But, by Jove, *yes*."

"Hooray!" said Milwarden, in a low voice.

"You'll never marry anything half so delightful, I can tell you," said Mr. Mangles. "You wouldn't understand her, you wouldn't appreciate her."

"Strong-minded, eh?" said Milwarden. "Dormer is welcome to her, for me."

"No, sir, she is not strong-minded, but beautiful-minded, if you comprehend that, only you don't. I shan't talk about her any more, except to tell you once for all that Ernest Dormer is a most lucky party."

"A most lucky party," echoed Henry Wigram, with something significant in the echo.

"Most," returned Mangles, direct to Wigram, who understood the special affirmation.

"I am very glad of it," said Wigram, as earnestly. What was implied, of course, was that Mangles had satisfied himself that there was no foundation for anything that had been whispered to him in that room, and that Wigram rejoiced in the extirpation of certain doubts.

"Here is to their healths," said Milwarden, raising a huge tumbler of iced seltzer water, slightly brandied, to his lips. "Where are they gone?"

"Into the Highlands, to some place near Loch Ness, lent to them by a friend of the old people."

"Old people nice?"

"Out and out. Mr. Conway is a very remarkable person, learned to excess, and full of something better than learning."

"You should introduce Tom Alford to him," said Milwarden, "they would exchange wonderful observations."

"It would take a wiser man than I see in this room to exhaust Mr. Conway's conversational power," said the editor. "I only wish that I could have stayed at Naybury for a week, but I had to come up by the night train."

"Naybury's a beastly place," said Rydon. "I was through it once, and a horse came down with me on the infernal hill, which I suppose they haven't taken away."

"It's not worse than other country towns, and the hill is a sort of feature. The Conways have a capital house, where if Dormer is not very comfortable, it will be his own fault. I could be."

"I dare say," said Launceston. "Fancy Mangles being happy in any place where he could not get the third edition of the evening papers."

"Sir," said Mr. Mangles, in Johnsonian style, "your sneer is ill-bred, and your logic is absurd. While engaged in my trade I require all its tools; when remitted to leisure I rejoice to lay them aside. Is your foolishness satisfied? Then ring the bell."

"But I say," said Launceston, "the paper says that your friend the Reverend Grafton assisted. Was that so?"

"Yes," said Mr. Mangles, drily.

"Excuse apparent vulgarity, but if I were to apply the word rummy to that arrangement —"

"You would apply not only an apparent but a real vulgarism. Still, I was rather surprised, but I presume there were reasons. I never ask questions. The breakfast was in the best style, the speeches were in the best taste, especially one of my own, and altogether, making charitable allowance for provincial difficulties, the whole affair was highly creditable."

"Bridesmaids pretty?" asked Doddy Dalton.

"What can it signify to you? Yes, no. There were four. Two very nice girls from Wales, a very pretty little person who lives near Naybury, a Miss Buxton, and an extremely plain, but I am told eminently pious personage, also a resident. The motive for that last selection was not obvious, the ugliness of the lady was, but I ought not to be ungrateful, for she was good enough to give me a tract."

"I say," said Jimmy Rydon, with real concern on his good-natured face, "you don't mean that Dormer has got in among that sort of thing?"

"Not a bit," said Mangles, hastening to relieve Mr. Rydon's mind from the apprehension that their common friend was in danger of religion. "I take it that the selection was another case of special reasons, and in the country you are obliged to do many things you don't like. Oh, not a bit. Mr. Conway is singularly without prejudices — sees all sides of matters, and therefore has no troublesome fanaticism about any side in particular, and his wife is a delightful person, a model mamma-in-law. I suspect the tract lady was out of her swim."

"Well," said Henry Milwarden, "much that you say is very consolatory, but I don't know. Of course it will be all rose-colour for a bit, but I fear that after a bit poor Ernest will find it dull times."

"We can't have everything," said Dick Marsden.

"I think," said Launceston, considerately, "that with what you describe, pleasant house, nice people, pretty wife, plenty of money, he might manage to hold on while the old folks live, and after that, if he is not acclimatised, and has not learned to talk of bullocks, he can come to town. Meantime he can run up a good deal, and come here to have his mind improved and purified."

"Come and be wound up once a fortnight, like a French clock," said Doddy.

"And you can send him books to cut up, Mangles," said Milwarden. "He can read them in a pleasing manner, to his wife and his family, after a five o'clock thick tea, and the reviews will be enriched with the interesting and improving observations made during the perusals."

"Thick tea be hanged," said Mangles, impatiently. "I tell you that it is a Christian family — not in the sense of the advertisements of housemaids who want to meet their young men *every* Sunday night — but their hours are much the same as our own, and in fact Conway is a country gentleman who happens to have a house in a country town. They lived in London for many years. I can't say whether Ernest Dormer is going to be happy or not, who can? But none of his discomforts will come out of his merely living out of London, so you may spare your obliging sympathies."

"It is a very odd thing," said Henry Wigram,

"that we all address ourselves to the question whether Ernest Dormer is going to be happy. Lots of fellows, of this club, have married, and I don't remember that we ever took the trouble to consider their future. Some of us here are married, but if the club has sat upon them and given verdicts, I know nothing about it. Isn't it curious that we raise this question, and everybody discusses it with so much interest?"

"He ought to know the great concern we all feel," said Doddy.

"I don't think he would care to hear it," said Mangles.

"Ungrateful cove," said Rydon; "but you are his friend, and ought to understand him."

"Not ungrateful, but I suspect he is not exactly the man who would be thankful to people for discussing his private affairs, especially in the compassionate sort of way which has marked the debates to-night."

"No," said Milwarden; "when you come to think of it, Dormer is not what you call a very sympathetic kind of fellow. Everybody likes him. I like him very much. But I don't think he goes in for confidences and all that, and except Mangles, I suppose nobody knows a great deal about his affairs. And yet, somehow, we all want this match to turn out well."

"Yes," said Henry Wigram, in a melancholy voice. "It would almost seem as if there was a notion that it might not turn out well. Such a demonstration of good wishes sounds ominous."

Mr. Mangles turned a not very friendly eye on the speaker, but did not answer him.

"I should like to see the lady," said Charles Launceston. "I suppose they will come to town some time or other."

"I hope you will," said Mangles, "and you will see something worth seeing."

"Dare say you have a photograph of her, Samuel?"

"I am so fortunate."

"Show."

"Shan't. I have no idea of handing the portrait of my friend's wife to be compared with likenesses of ballet-girls and that sort, which half of you have in your pockets. Besides, I haven't got it here. The better kind among you may see it at my chambers, if you call at a proper time."

"When he is not conspiring with that man in black whom I always see there, privily in their lurking dens to murder the innocent," said Henry Milwarden.

"The fellow has been to church, and listened to what he heard," said Mangles. "My dear Milwarden, what does this mean? Oh, but you went with the judges, perhaps?"

"Never mind about that. Do you just learn to infuse a little mercy into your own justice, and not treat an author as if authorship were a crime."

"It is a crime, Mr. Milwarden, in many cases, and deserves a much severer punishment than I can award — the sort of punishment that usually descends on criminals when you have defended them."

"One for you, Henry," said Tom Alford.

"What! — you see it? Then, Mangles, you have hit too hard," said Milwarden, laughing.

"You'll deserve it next time. And further, Mr. Milwarden, I would remark to you, and the like of you, who protest against the wholesome severities of criticism, that there is no true humanity in sparing a bad book. And further, again, as you have chosen

to quote from the best book, which is not a proper practice on light occasions, I will do the same, or at least I will call your attention to a strong case of anti-sentimentalism. Have you attended church long enough to have heard of St. Paul? Or, stay, in going to Guildhall, you must have seen a cathedral dedicated to a saint of that name?"

"I know of him," said Milwarden; "he was a great cricketer, stood up for the Eleven, and was bowled, and Rhoda stood at the wicket."

"One did not expect in the Octagon Club a reproduction of cuttings from the *facetiae* of the American newspapers, Mr. Milwarden."

"Never mind about that, as I said before. I know all about St. Paul."

"In that case you may remember that on a certain occasion, a viper came out of some faggots and fastened on his hand?"

"Yes, I have seen a picture of it."

"Well, what did he say of the venomous beast?"

"I don't remember that he said anything."

"Quite right. Assuredly he did not say that though he could not approve its apparent intention to poison, he was willing to make allowance for its instincts, and would not refuse to credit it with a most lustrous skin, and with much grace of action. That would have been the sentimental style of treatment which you like. Do you know what Paul did? He shook off the venomous beast into the Fire. He took care that it should hurt neither the barbarous people nor his own educated companions. There's a text and a sermon for you, and if another person asks me for another word of wisdom to-night, he won't get it."

"There's something in you, Samuel," said Milwarden, coolly, "in spite of what most people think to the contrary. See as much of me as you can, and so add knowledge of men and things to your knowledge of books, and in time you will be a credit to the club. Why did not you ask me to hand you those lights, instead of getting up?"

"*On n'est jamais mieux servi que par soi-même*," said Mangles.

"Is his accent at all tolerable, Marsden — you have lived a deal among the natives?"

"I have heard a worse," said Dick Marsden, "your own, for instance."

"That I utterly disbelieve," said Henry Milwarden, "for I was complimented the other day by a police magistrate upon the masterly way in which I spoke Italian to an organ-boy witness, and a person who can speak Italian can speak French."

"Or people think so," said Launceston, "on the principle, I suppose, that if you quote Greek, you must certainly be a tremendous swell at Latin."

"Quote some Greek, Tom Alford," said Milwarden. "Mind that the sentiments are unexceptionably moral, though, or I shall leave the room."

"Why should I do a feat for nothing?" said Tom Alford, indolently, and yet there was just a gleam of sparkle in his good eyes.

"Quite right," said the lawyer. "I'll bet you a sovereign you can't quote Greek."

"Done with you," said Alford, yawning.

"By Jupiter, he takes the bet," said Milwarden. "The savage Orson is endowed with reason. I wonder

what he's going to say — something he has heard from the Christy Minstrels."

"The bet's made, hold your row, Henry," said Doddy Dalston, who was always alive to the athletic sport of betting, "and go ahead, Thomas, my son. Mangles, be umpire. Go it, Tom."

"*Zoe mou sas agapo*," said Tom Alford, as bold as brass, and speaking as correctly as a fellow of Trinity.

A great shout went up, and Milwarden's laugh was as loud as anybody's, as he crossed to the distinguished Grecian and put the sovereign into his hand.

"All right, old fellow," said Tom Alford, pocketing the money, "and now I've had my revenge on you for poking fun at me all night."

"I suppose that you won't tell us how you came to know those words," said Launceston, "but you might tell us whether you think they are in Homer or in Virgil."

But Tom Alford was too knowing a badger to be drawn again, and he merely responded by drinking Charley Launceston's health.

"I forget what part of the Highlands you said the Dormers were going to, Mangles," said Wigram.

"Loch Ness way," said Mangles, answering as briefly as he well could, for he had been displeased at certain words from the last speaker.

"I should also like to see Mrs. Dormer," said Henry Wigram. "You said you would show me that photograph, Mangles."

"I said I would show it to any particular friend of Dormer's who might call at my rooms," said Mangles, coldly, and somewhat modifying what he *had* said.

“Well, I suppose I may call myself that,” said Henry, looking a little surprised at the tone of the other. “When can I come?”

“I am at home most mornings until three,” said Mr. Mangles, and it could scarcely be called an invitation. He had taken a notion into his head, and until he could reason it out, one way or the other, he chose to place Wigram in a sort of moral quarantine. The House then proceeded to the orders of the day, and we may leave it sitting for the good of society generally.

CHAPTER XIX.

Golden Eggs.

IN a small, plain, scantily-furnished room, whose newness showed that it had been an addition to the pleasant and comfortable cottage in its front, there were found one morning — some time before the marriage of Ernest and Magdalen — three persons, two of whom are known to the reader and one is not. The two were children, the third was their mother.

The unfurnished condition of the apartment was clearly a matter of choice with its tenant. The little home to which the room was an adjunct was very pretty, with its pictures, and gay chintz, and flowers; it had been adorned by good taste, and there had been no enforced thrift in providing its furniture. It stood in a garden (rather large for a London suburb), and this was surrounded by a wall high enough to screen it from the sight of passers-by, and the gate was solid, with a tiny opening enabling the inmates of the house to receive letters and messages without necessarily

admitting the bearers. These latter arrangements had been made by a previous occupant, who had his own reasons for being exclusive, and for other reasons they were acceptable to the present resident. The apartment in the rear was a sort of studio. Beyond a screen for snugness, and a table, on which were some colours and other artistic necessities, and near which was a very high and straight-backed chair, the room held only a single note-worthy article, but this was a key to the use of the place. It was a huge book, in elephant folio, resting on an easel. It contained a large number of elaborately drawn and exquisitely-coloured plates, and they all represented varieties of eggs. It was the most approved and most costly authority that could be procured for money, and it had been a birthday present to the little lady who now sat near it.

This personage will probably make her appearance but seldom during the progress of our story, and she is introduced only because considerations, of which a narrator must be the best judge, render it necessary to illustrate the history of one of the principal characters. These words are written in no affectation of fastidiousness, for from a tale which assumes to be of real life in a given age, it would be more than a folly, it would be an untruthfulness, to exclude any social fact of prominence. But it is far more pleasant to write of things and of persons of comparatively unassailable character, and the writer who needlessly intrudes what is unwelcome to the really good, may pair off with him who from cowardice avoids what appears to him essential to the development of his picture.

The lady who sat near the elephant folio was

young, slight, and apparently but just recovering from severe illness, which had given her complexion a delicacy that might not seem in keeping with a face that was expressive of a quaint merriment. Her dark hair, of which she had a good deal, was worn in a sort of crop round her head, and none of it came down to her shoulders. She had very large eyes, and a pretty mouth, which seemed very ready to laugh at the shortest notice. In other respects she might not have been thought very attractive by men accustomed to the glorious varieties of beauty which may be seen in English society. Probably a man who went much into drawing-rooms would not have said more of her than that she was a nice little person, and apparently very companionable. And his not over liberal tribute would have been reasonably just. We have no new heroine to bring upon the scene in the person of one who has been two or three times named as Lucy, and who was known to her tradespeople, and her very few friends as Mrs. Verner.

Quietly attired in a striped morning dress, Mrs. Verner was quietly working away at her favourite occupation. She was painting an egg, the humble egg of the breakfast-table, or some even less honourable egg, and was making it like unto one which for their own reasons collectors much prize, and will buy at vast prices. She copied the delicate hues from her large book, and the plebeian article was gradually becoming a worthy rival of the natural production which she was imitating.

Of the two children — they were seen for a moment in Kensington Gardens — one on a low stool was studying, with frowning gravity, a toy-book, the other

was dutifully waiting near the large volume, until her mother should be willing to turn over its pages, and explain its glories. The elder child beguiled her leisure by an occasional song, which she was good enough to execute in a very confidential tone, for she had been entreated to spare the nerves of a convalescent, and a more affectionate little thing could not have been found than Mopes. The Dormouse was too young to have learned that she owed the least return for the kindness of anybody, and having no knowledge of such a debt, usually set at total defiance all suggestions that did not exactly meet her private views. It luckily suited her, on the present occasion, to keep obstinate silence, and gaze sternly at a picture-book which, the same morning, on its being tendered for her amusement, she had promptly consigned to her bath.

So there was stillness in the little party, and the only sounds that were heard were those of the rustling of the Dormouse's book, and the occasional plashing of the water when Mrs. Verner washed her paint-brush.

A ring at the gate-bell, and Mrs. Verner started nervously.

"Kaken, praps," exclaimed the younger child, throwing down her book, and rushing at the door, with intent to satisfy her mind. But the door being closed, and her powers being inadequate to the lifting a latch by which it was fastened, the young lady instantly set up a great howl, which she suddenly subdued as Colonel Latrobe entered.

That officer was evidently a friend of the little family. In two minutes the Dormouse was transformed from a raging imp into a smiling cherub — at least in her mother's eyes, a glittering box of bon-bons effect-

ing the change. A similar present was handed to her sister, who took it with a look of quiet thanks, and immediately laid it aside. Latrobe shook hands with Mrs. Verner, and fetched himself a chair from the adjoining room.

Mrs. Verner looked at him earnestly for a moment — she flushed and trembled — and led the children from the studio.

Presently she returned, and before saying a word, she carefully put away her painting materials, and closed her large book. As she did this, she looked steadily at Walter Latrobe.

Very gravely, Latrobe made a gesture, meaning that she was right.

"I knew that was your errand," she said in a sweet, sad voice.

"You knew it?"

"Yes. It would have been kinder to let me know sooner, and in another way from that in which it came to me, but never mind. Do not be afraid of a scene, Walter," she added, wiping some large tears from her beautiful eyes.

"I think you know, Lucy, that I would rather have gone on any devil's errand than come on this," he said, in an under voice, and from between his teeth.

"You have always been very kind to me and the children; and they are very fond of you. It was good in you to come. I expected a different sort of messenger, or a letter."

"May I ask you who has been speaking to you?"

"A woman. But you do not know her. And she only confirmed what I had been guessing at, and tormenting myself about, for months, and what made me

so ill that at one time I believed I should need no cruel messages. But I am quite strong now. I could not die. I looked at the children and I could not die. I am quite strong, and able to hear all that you are sent to say to me."

"Strong," said Walter, impatiently, "you are not fit——"

As he spoke, a door slammed, and Lucy, alarmed, started out of her seat, and then breathed heavily, and began to cry. Then she mastered herself with a great effort, and forcing a smile, which was very piteous, she said,

"That is nothing—you know I always hated a slamming door, and that was why he had that latch put on for me—it prevents the door from shutting very easily, don't you understand?"

"Don't talk against your grief, that's a dear woman," he said, very kindly. "I can see how ill you are, and I know all that you are feeling."

"You! A man. No, you are very good, Walter, but you know very little about it. But I promise not to cry any more. I know how men detest it. You may say what you are told to say. See, I am quite firm—see how steadily I can hold this water-glass."

She thought that she could, but the coloured water was so shaken as she held up the little glass in her thin fingers, that had Latrobe needed any proof of her weakness, he had one. He took the glass from her.

"Why do you do this with me?" he said.

"I want you to tell him I behaved well, as well as I could at least," she said, struggling hard to keep her promise against crying again.

"If it will please you I will tell him, tell him that

you behaved nobly," said Walter Latrobe, earnestly. "But I am not come to speak of him. I do not think I ought to speak at all, until you are better. See here," he went on, taking her hand as a brother might have done. "You have nothing to learn, so talking of the past would only give you needless pain. Let us have the doctors, and the fresh air, and the strength, and in the mean time let me only tell you that everything shall be done — is done — for your comfort, and that I am your guardian and the children's. I think you can trust me and what I say. Let things be so until you are well, and then we will arrange everything."

"Fresh air," said Lucy, who had looked up suddenly at the words, and had apparently heard nothing after them. "Then we *are* to be sent away! I thought — I hoped he would not have done that. Oh, I have been so happy here. I cannot go away. I will not go away. Yes I will, I will go directly, whenever you please. I will do whatever I am told. Please, Walter, do not say that I said I would not. I did not mean it. I was only thinking how happy I had been, and that perhaps he might have let me stay here a little while. But I am ready, I will go to-morrow — my little packing will not take much time, and then the children's things —"

It was of no use. She did her best, but her heart was too full, and she pressed her hands vehemently to her face, and wailed, rocking herself to and fro.

The soldier who had with cries and curses hurled a fierce handful of his men against outnumbering enemies, and had smitten through brow and brain till the terrified savages recoiled before the fury of that White

Demon, sprang straight up and fairly rushed from the room.

It was Lucy who had to seek him. And she found him seated on a couch in her little drawing-room, pale as herself, and gazing vacantly at the window.

"Oh," he said, starting as her hand touched his shoulder, "I am not the sort of person to come on such business. I am a fool where a woman's grief is part of it. I could tell a man that he was to be hanged in five minutes — I have done it — and thought no more about it. I am behaving execrably to you, Lucy, and I beg your pardon. I don't know how long I have been out of the room."

"Not many minutes," she said. "I broke my promise dreadfully, and you will not trust me again, but you may. Tell me about our — our going away."

"But you are not to go away," he said, with what is called an oath, but which, in his honest indignation at the thought of a cruelty, we will not count against him. "Who talked to you of going away?"

"I heard something — never mind. He has not sold the things, then?" she said, timidly.

"No. Who said he had?"

"No one, exactly; but I was led to believe it. I ought not to have believed it. And yet I don't know why he should not, if he pleased. They are all his, and God knows I would not ask to keep a thing which he wished to have."

"Lucy, I am not here to say that anything he has done is right; but you will not accuse him of being a cold-hearted scoundrel?"

"He!" said Lucy, her pale face flushing crimson.

"He never said an unkind word or did an unkind thing to me in my life, and as for this great sorrow, it is not his doing. I know what it all means, and I am a wicked little thing to rage against it when it is his salvation. Never you dare to say that I thought an ill thought against him, much less said a hard word."

Her changed mood was a great relief to Walter Latrobe, and thenceforth he managed his embassy with the calmness of a man of the world.

"You always knew my opinion of grief, Lucy," he said, "and all that you say shows me how right I was in believing you to be one of the best creatures in the world. And now we will speak calmly, for you are in no state to be excited, and if I am to be your guardian, I must insist in your minding what I tell you. I had a great mind not to talk business at all, but it may quiet your mind if I tell you one or two things. Everything in this house, from the door-mat to the roof, is yours for ever and ever, to keep or do what you like with. Understand that. Then, as for living here —"

"Yes," she murmured, anxiously.

"It is the best thing you can do. There are four or five years of the lease yet, and if you should continue to like the place, I dare say we can get it renewed for you. And there will be three hundred a year paid to you regularly. I take charge of that, and whether I am here, or in any other part of the world, my agents will honour your order. But for the comfort of having to tell you of these arrangements, Lucy, I would sooner have gone away from England, than have undertaken to see you to-day."

While he was speaking, Lucy's large eyes dilated

in the most singular fashion, and fixed Latrobe's curious gaze upon them. His surprise seemed exceeding, but there was no pleasure in the surprise.

"As far as this part of the business goes," he said, after a pause, "I hope you think that he is behaving well."

"Walter, you must answer me something. Swear to tell me the truth."

"You will have nothing but the truth from me."

"Here you come, offering me more money than I ever thought to have in this world, and laying out a life of such comfort as money can give — and now tell me this. Does this come from what he gets with his — with the lady he marries? Answer me that truthfully, and do not — please do not — tell me a falsehood because I am a woman. I know men think that is all right, but I must and will know the truth, if I have to find it out for myself. Am I being taken care of out of — out of the price of his marriage — there?"

"Not a farthing of the provision comes from any source but his own property, and he always intended it for you."

"How long?" she asked, sharply, and he saw the meaning.

"Why, of course, from the moment he found it necessary to make the — the new arrangement," said Walter, trying to avoid words of unwelcome sound.

"And when was that?"

"I cannot say exactly, but as I am his most intimate friend, I may well suppose that I knew his position nearly as soon as he did, and therefore I can say that it is but a short time since he discovered it."

"What I am now going to ask I know you will not tell me."

"At least try."

"It is of no use. You will say what you think least likely to hurt my feelings, and yet you will make a great mistake if you disguise the truth to spare me."

"As I said before, I will answer you frankly."

"Is it" — she said gaspingly, but with steady resolution not to give way again — "is it a love-match, and will he be very happy?"

"It is not a love-match. I hope that he will be happy. I do not think that he will."

"But she is young, and beautiful, and good — I know all that — do not think to comfort me by saying that he has thrown himself away for money."

"I believe her to be all you say."

"Then why should he not be happy?"

"I can tell you my impression only," said Walter, gloomily. "I cannot give you a reason, I cannot give myself one."

This, of course, was untrue, but it was certainly not for Colonel Latrobe to explain his private thoughts to Mrs. Verner.

Lucy looked at him hard, but he contrived to preserve the look with which he had answered. Her colour went and came rapidly for some seconds, and she kept silence. At last she said,

"Walter, you are a man of honour, and you have told me a falsehood. Don't be angry. You had a right to tell it. But you have not deceived me, and I am happier than I expected ever to be again."

"Yes," he said, man-like, "I was glad to believe that when you thought it over, and thought of the

children, you would consider, perhaps, that as much had been done as possible to make a painful affair less painful, and I shall be sincerely happy to watch over your interests, and, indeed, the necessary documents are already in preparation."

"And," she said, gazing at him, not in scorn, for his kindness would have prevented that, but with a sort of sadness, "do you, Walter Latrobe, think that when I said happier — and I have not had such a word in my heart for I don't know the day when — do you believe I was thinking of furniture and money? No, no. But I am thinking of them now, thinking of them very much indeed, and I rely on you to take all and every care of me."

"Most certainly I will."

"And you don't ask what I mean?"

"Perhaps I had better not."

"I see. She is young, and beautiful, and rich, and good, and you laugh to think of my presumption in thinking it possible — and it is presumptuous, but we shall see."

"I had better know nothing of what you think or hope, Lucy. That is not within my province, as your friend or his. I am very glad to see you calm, and now I want to see you strong."

"Yes, and I mean to grow strong, for I mean to work like a little lion."

"Work, my child? What nonsense! Can't you live on three hundred a year?"

"Live, Walter? I mean to *save* three hundred a-year. No, not quite so much, as I shall have to pay my rent out of that money, at least until I get back all my clients."

"Did I not mention that? I am stupid to-day. I am to pay your rent."

"And not take it out of my allowance?"

"Certainly not."

"That is very kind, and I accept that too, with gratitude. Then I will save all my allowance."

"What on earth do you mean, Lucy?"

He was a good man, as men go, but he was always ready to think ill thoughts of women, though he treated them so kindly. But he had scarcely begun to let his thoughts veer in an unfavourable direction, as regarded Lucy, when they were promptly recalled.

"The eggs! The eggs!"

The illness and the excitement have worked on her poor little brain, thought Colonel Latrobe. She is simply going mad. This will be dreadful news for Ernest Dormer. And what am I to do with her, and then those dear children?

All which speculations rushed through the kind-hearted soldier's head with lightning speed, but they were all apart from the purpose.

"Why, how you glare at me, Walter. Did you never know how I maintained myself, and my mother until she died, dear soul, in the days before — before I became Mrs. Verner?"

"No — I — no, certainly not."

"I wonder he never told you. But he said that it was not honest, and that at all events he would not have it, so I only went on for pleasure and practice, and O how glad I am I did. He was so kind about it, built me that little room — my pantry, as he called it, and gave me the splendid book of eggs, instead of a heap of dirty old sheets of pictures which I bought in

Dean-street, and paid for, little by little, to a good old Jew."

"I also have paid money, little by little, to a good old Jew," said Latrobe, more and more puzzled, and scarcely knowing what he said.

"You don't understand yet. I forged eggs."

"Forged eggs?"

"Yes, do you not see?"

"Well, if you come to that," said Walter, who began to be amused, "I don't. What for? I remember in Shakspeare somebody says, 'Will you take eggs for money?' and where that's done I can see the good of forging. But in England—what *do* you mean, Lucy?"

"And you don't know? I could almost laugh, only I am sure that it would hurt me so dreadfully. Why, people collect eggs, buy them of dealers, and at auctions, and the dealers get very high prices for some sorts, and don't pay badly for the forgeries, which are just as good as the real ones, of course, only the stupid buyers would not think so."

"And you used to paint the imitations?"

"Yes. It was rather amusing work, and just suited me. I got to be very clever at it, and my forgeries would always sell. I got two or three little secrets about colours from a gentleman who forged pictures—I mean painted them, and then walked over them, and crinkled and crackled them, and stamped on them with dirty shoes, until they looked hideous enough, and then he sold them to picture-dealers, who named them Rembrandts, or what you please, and got awful prices from noblemen. I thought of trying that once, and the gentleman—he is now an eminent painter, and his

works are bought for their own merits — he gave me some lessons. But I never could have brought my heart to trample upon my work and spoil it. So I kept to my eggs, and they were golden eggs for my mother and me."

"And you want to begin again?"

"I want to begin to sell again. I have a great many beautiful ones ready, only, as I told you, he would not let me sell them, but now he has nothing to do with it, so he cannot be displeased. And I mean to get strong, and look up my old dealers, and work morning and night."

"But this is foolish, surely. Why not live on your allowance? And if you think it is not enough —"

"Dear Walter, it is a great deal too much for poor little me, but not for my object. I mean to put it all away, and you must take care of it, to the best advantage."

"It is quite right that you should think of providing for the children," said Colonel Latrobe (throwing a new fly), "but you must not injure your health, or deprive yourself of comforts."

"I shall get as strong as possible, I tell you, Walter, and I shall be as comfortable as I can be in this world, until — but I will not say any more. You will manage my affairs for me, and I will be most grateful. I will give you such a pretty set of eggs, in memory of to-day, if you will accept them."

"I told you an hour ago that you were one of the best creatures I know. Now I may say that you are one of the strangest."

"Oh, but accept my poor eggs. They are not much to offer, but they are given with a full heart, and they shall be the best I can paint."

"My dear silly girl, of course I will take them, and they shall have a place of honour in my rooms. But, as your guardian, I forbid you to begin too furiously. Take it easy until your health is restored. If you do not, I shall interfere."

"Come and see me sometimes, and judge for yourself whether I am not behaving wisely."

"Very well. I shall have some business papers to give you in a few days."

"A very few days," said Lucy, losing the spirit with which she had been speaking, and again becoming deadly white. "Stop, please don't tell me. I know that any such business must be done before he — he goes away. But do not let me know anything about the day — keep from me till all is over. I am very brave — but I think I should go mad if I knew the day."

"You shall not hear it from me. Do you read the newspaper? Better not."

"Yes, I will," said Lucy. "I will cut out what you mean, and I will wear it in a locket."

"Foolish. Wrong."

"You do not think so, Walter Latrobe. You have been pretending not to understand me, but you do understand me perfectly. You have told me — you did not mean it — but you have told me that which will give me strength and courage, and I will tell you something in return."

"You will not do so," said Walter Latrobe, firmly. "I told you so before, and please let this be always understood between us. I am a friend of Ernest Dormer's, and I have undertaken a duty at his request. I am no party to anything inconsistent with that duty."

"Except one, Walter, you are the best friend I ever had, and I have learned it to-day, and God bless you."

"By the way, Lucy," said Latrobe, resolved to change the conversation, "about money to go on with. May I give you some?"

"Not a farthing. I have plenty. I am rich. More than I can spend for three months—he left it here for me."

"Left it," repeated Walter.

"He brought the children home. They saw you with him in the gardens. You will remember when that was."

"Yes, I remember. You have never seen him since?"

"What makes you ask that?" said Lucy.

"On second thoughts, I don't ask it," said Walter Latrobe. "It is his secret, if there is any, keep it."

"Yes, indeed I will," said Lucy, the sudden tears once more starting to her large eyes.

But something had ruffled even Walter Latrobe, and he had rapidly passed into a condition of mind in which he was indisposed to play the comforter any more. He took her hand, looked at her kindly for a moment, just touched her forehead with his lips, and was gone.

The noise of the door instantly summoned the children, who flew to the window to kiss hands to their friend and benefactor before he should get to the gate. For a wonder Walter forgot to look round, and the roar which the Dormouse set up at his discourtesy might have been heard in the distant road. Mopes looked wistfully after him, too, but was instantly re-

called to her self-appointed duties by the howl of her sister.

"How can you make such a noise and mamma ill?" she said.

The Dormouse thought this question worthy of some attention, and she interrupted her roar in the middle, with a full intention of resuming it exactly at the place where it had broken off. But looking round at the person spoken of, the child was effectually hushed.

"Her's dead."

It was not so, however, but Lucy had fainted.

"She believes that she will get him back again," said Walter Latrobe, as he walked away to his home.

"And, by the Nine Gods, I am afraid to say that it is not on the cards. It all depends upon the temper and tact of the other one."

"The other one." Yes, that was the form of words adopted by the *preux chevalier* Colonel Walter Latrobe.

CHAPTER XX.

Hearts in the Highlands.

THE sketching out a wedding tour, while over your manly shoulder leans tenderly the girl who is noting the places where, when you shall have taken her away from all her friends, she is to sojourn with yourself, in helpless reliance on your love and service, is one of the half dozen incidents of life which leave an abiding and a pleasant recollection. It will be for those who have thus far traced the lives of Ernest Dormer and Magdalen Conway to say whether, while the former,

pencil in hand, was showing the latter, on the map of northern England and of Scotland, the stages of their journey, and their final resting-place during the honeymoon, both or either experienced all the most delightful of the sensations which should accompany that piece of cartography. It may be that all the Purple Light did not gleam upon that wedding journey.

But nothing was wanting to its happiness, so far as other persons could perceive. No bridegroom was ever more attentive and tender than Ernest, no bride could be more beautiful and gentle than Magdalen. They were dismissed to their happiness with all the honours of friendship, and all the prayers of affection. No trouble seemed in store for them, and there was no doubtful future before them, into which a young husband had to look with a resolve to conquer the future, and into which a young wife could but send glances of hope that he might win. Their future was assured, and after the customary interval between marriage and society, Ernest Dormer was to begin the dignified life of a country gentleman of ample means, and Magdalen Dormer was to return to her home, which would be brightened by the addition of conjugal love to that which had ever made it joyous.

"Papa was anxious to recommend the Caledonian Canal, as our route to Inverness, dearest Magdalen," said Ernest, as on the third day after the marriage they were flying through the splendid scenery of the Highland line, and obtaining too brief glances at places whose names are histories.

"And I saw that you were trying to lead him away from that idea without exactly opposing it, dear. I know that you had some good reason, and I wondered

why you did not give it him, as he is generally so very reasonable."

"The reason was over my left shoulder, love."

"What, sir, *me*," said Mrs. Dormer, with a favourite avoidance of grammar.

"Yes, *me*. The steam-boats are excessively comfortable, and I hope to hear you say so one of these days. But, somehow, people always continue to find out when a newly married couple is on board, and though it would be the proudest thing in the world for me to walk up and down the deck, and show myself the exulting owner of such a prize as this," (His illustrative action it is immaterial to note) "I am not sure that the situation would be quite so pleasant for my wife. I have been very curious, in my time, about other people's brides on board these boats."

"And how dared you be, sir? Dearest, you think of everything for me!"

And so they went on to Inverness, and Magdalen was quite enthusiastic about the pretty islands round which the Ness rushes and sparkles, and declared that all funereal gloom was absent from the cemetery, laid out, by a bold and original thought, on the summit of the woody hill of the Fairies. Next morning they departed in an open carriage for the house which had been lent them. And here, if a lover of nature could not be happy, the fault was not with his mistress.

The house, originally a shooting-box, but much enlarged in various directions, stood nearly at the top of a richly clad hill, so high that except among mountains it would be called a mountain. The upward road to this nest was severe, but there was another and a winding path for the foot-traveller, and Ernest, hav-

ing obtained the route at the last inn, stopped the carriage, and invited his wife to alight. As she smilingly obeyed, he signed to the driver to go on, and opening a rustic gate, he led Magdalen, wondering a little at his proceedings, into a sudden shade formed by the over-arching and entwining boughs and branches of a wood. The sun's rays had been streaming somewhat fiercely on the open carriage, and this rapid change into sweet, soft greenery, in which the eyes loved to bathe themselves, was delicious to Magdalen. She stood still for a few minutes, leaning on his arm, in a silence which he would not break. At last she said, in a low voice,

"Tell me, dear, am I in a dream? I have been living so very fast lately, that this quietude bewilders me."

"A dream, darling, which you may call up whenever it may please you. This is the opening of your own domain, for a happy month at least. We shall gradually wind round and up the hill, till we come to the house. I thought that you would like this better than witnessing the struggle of the horses up the dusty road."

"Ernest, this is a Paradise. The sward is softer than any carpet, and only look at the rich tint of it. And, O Ernest, look at those slanting rays breaking through the thinner foliage and coming down in green upon the wild-flowers, but beaten back, see, by those great strong branches that are so thick with leaves. I can never come away from here, sir, you must send for a tent and set up our abode."

However, when his bride had gazed somewhat longer, and had gathered some flowers for her pretty

travelling hat, he induced her to proceed, and he led her up the winding way, which increased in beauty as they came on. Here the varied lights and shades which had enchanted Magdalen gave place to a tiny lawn of light green turf, which seemed prepared for a fairy tournament, and which was defined and guarded by rushes which might serve for the fairy lances. Then they came into a deeper and sterner gloom, which Magdalen enjoyed the more that she leant on the arm of a protector, and here she lingered, amusing herself with mock terrors, which might have been real, had she been alone. And now they found that they had made considerable upward progress, for suddenly, as they turned, they found a bold cutting in the forest to their right hand, and saw a broad and dashing river foaming white amid its rocks many a yard below. To their left, against the side of the hill they were conquering, hospitality had placed a rustic seat, and hence Magdalen looked out, over the underwoods and the river to some wide uplands, and to bold grey heights. Far away, a shepherd's dog, with the marvellous instinct of his race, was doing all the work of the master, who seemed to do little but vouchsafe an occasional sign; and still farther away, and high on the ridge of a mountain forest, where some of the trees had been felled, and had decayed, Magdalen saw, for the first time, the noblest of the beasts of British chase. There stood in his pride the lordly stag.

Rested and charmed, again up the hill, and they reached a point which almost suggested danger to the dweller in a less rough region. They were now very high, and the forest trees for a time disappeared from the side of the path, and left it narrow and naked, and

overlooking precipices of what Magdalen thought terrible height, and around which some roaring water added, as it seemed, to the terror. But her sensation was scarcely a fear, and her husband's hand was in her own. They still climbed, and now the ascent began to be really steep, and the abysses to be more formidable, while the view, whenever it was afforded by a gap, became bolder and wider, and mountains of grander form, sometimes shrouded in mist, at others revealed in dim proportions, came upon the scene, and dwarfed what had previously been imposing. One more dark glade, and then a sparkling vista of light greenery, and then a turn in the path, a gate, and Magdalen stood in as prettily tinted and neatly kept a flower-garden as her own at Naybury.

"The very loveliest walk I ever had in all my life, Ernest, and I shall never forget it if I live a hundred years, as you say is the custom of people in this air, and I don't wonder at it, for I seem to have new strength. I could not have climbed such a hill in England."

"We have very good air in England, Mrs. Dormer, and especially near Naybury, where I hope to attend you up many hills. That you got up here so easily was due to the attentions of your devoted husband, who will now go and see to the disembarkation of your luggage. Will you rest here, love, or come into the house?"

"Oh, my house. I must see my house. I never had a house before, all my own — think of that!"

"No, dear Magdalen, and I am not to give you one of your own, so enjoy your undisputed right here as much as you can."

Magdalen looked at him for a moment, perhaps a little anxiously.

"It will be all the same at Naybury, dear, as if the house were yours — ours, I mean. I hope you are sure of that."

"It will be far better, dear. Only it is so pretty to see a young lady taking absolute command of a household. Come, however, and take it here."

She pressed his arm affectionately as they passed from the garden round to a little rustic porch, beyond which was a small stone hall, adorned with stag's antlers. A couple of Skye terriers, and another dog or two rushed out at them with the most frenzied clamour, as if bent upon the instant extirpation of the strangers, but three or four words from Ernest, intimating that his intentions were friendly, brought the creatures dancing around him and Magdalen, and apologising by the most abject gestures of affection, after which the entire quadrupedal party suddenly started off in chase of a rabbit which had ventured within view. The cry of dogs brought out the neatest of little English maidens, who had been forwarded to the north specially to attend upon the bride, and also a large, powerful, dark-eyed Highland woman, a resident servant of the owners of the house, who was cook and chief, and who beamed the most favouring smiles upon Magdalen, but, not having any great fluency in English, reserved her utterances, and contented herself with seizing from the carriage which had just arrived about three times as much in the way of load as a southron servant would have attempted, and with this the Highland woman stalked into the house apparently without effort.

"Look at that, Magdalen," said Ernest. "If I had been called to the burglarious station in life, I should not like to attack a house defended by that woman. This solitary abode is as safe as Woolwich Arsenal."

"Any thought of danger where you are never came to me," whispered Magdalen; "but I suppose, as you say, this is very solitary. What is that noise?" she exclaimed, as a new and continuous sound came upon her ear.

"Something you will love; but perhaps we had better go in before I tell you."

The powerful Highland woman came back, and with a gesture of singular grace invited them to enter.

"And I have a letter for you, sir," said the smiling little English girl.

It was only a kind note from the owner of the house, welcoming the young couple to their first home, all things in and around which were placed unreservedly at their disposal, and assuring them that in Highland Margaret they would find the most devoted of vassals, and in little Netty, the English maid, the most attentive of domestics. A paper of suggestions about excursions, views, and the best way of enjoying that scenery was enclosed.

The house, if it could so be called, had shot out arms, polypus fashion, from a centre which had been the shooting-box, and which was now fitted up as a smoking-room. In different directions went away a long and rather narrow parlour, another room of somewhat more pretensions, which was library, drawing-room, and billiard-room in one; while another arm contained bed-rooms and dressing-rooms, and a fourth seemed to lead to an outlying kitchen. All was small,

and the endeavour of the owner had been to create a comfort and a snugness which on a splendid day of sunshine was less appreciated than when the gloaming came on, and the Highland forests began to talk aloud to the winds. There was little paint in the house, the woodwork seen everywhere was bright and varnished, and various gay colours, of the tartan kind, appeared in the furniture, and increased the cheeriness of the place. Magdalen hastened in delight from room to room, closely followed by Netty, whose intense admiration for her temporary mistress was noted and approved by Ernest. He liked to see others like what he liked.

"Netty," said Ernest, who had been told something about the house, and who never forgot what he had been told, "where are the stairs leading to the room with the balcony?"

"This way, sir," said Netty.

"Mamma told us, Magdalen, to go into that room as soon as ever we arrived."

"So she did. I had forgotten. Let us go."

They mounted a short, but steep stair, with red ropes on each side, by way of balusters, and came into the balcony room, which was but slightly furnished — people did not come there for the sake of the room. Ernest threw open a French window, and stepped out upon a platform, strongly built, strongly railed, and after a searching glance that assured him of its security, he handed out his young wife. And in all her life she never forgot the scene which opened upon her.

They stood at a very great height, and immediately below them the ground sloped down at a sharp angle, until the eye was stopped by thick underwood at a

distance of some forty yards, but it was manifest that a vast and unseen depth beyond had to be accounted for. Across that abyss, and perhaps a couple of miles away in the distance, the great lake lay, silver with sunshine, and between, a river, dotted with foam, made its way. But this could be seen but at intervals, the rich foliage hiding it at many points, and at others darkening it so that but for the foam-spots it would not have been visible. Hills of a great magnitude, but of somewhat soft outline rose on the left, at about the same distance as the lake, and at their foot lay a small village on the bank of the river — Magdalen could just see a few gliding figures on the road, a few cattle reluctantly moving from their pasture. But on the right the scene was grander and rougher. One object dominated all — a huge and uncouth mountain, in solitary savageness, upheaved its bulk against the blue sky, and looked monumental and defiant, and though the noon-day sun forbad it to scowl in shadow, perhaps its stern sides were the more striking from their being lighted out, and forced into brightness, like a cynical man compelled to smile upon society, but waiting to indemnify himself when the social period shall be over. And all the scene, the frowning mountain, the forests over the abyss, the softer hills and the silent village were bathed in the glow of a glorious sun, who, if according to southern superstition he looks down somewhat rarely on Scotland, looks on her with no grudging gaze when he beams out upon her unequalled scenery.

"It is too grand to talk about, love," said Magdalen in a low voice, and with tears in her eyes — the first the young wife had shed.

He pressed her to his side, and knew he pleased her best by silence. And for a long time he let her enjoy the scene, only once or twice pointing out, without speaking, some feature which he specially wished her to note. But he waited for her to break the charm, and she was in no haste to do so. At last she said,

"That noise, Ernest. It cannot be the wind, all is so still."

"Shall I show you what it means, or are you fatigued?"

"Fatigued — here. I never shall be."

"Then come with me. I will not take you far."

They went out, not entirely to the content of the Highland woman, who revealed to Netty a conviction that it was unlucky, after entering a house for the first time, to leave it without tasting food. To which Netty, bringing her English habits of mind to bear on the question, responded that no doubt they had had a good breakfast at Inverness, and that there was no use in eating when you were not hungry.

Skirting the house, which by the way its owners, or their friends, called the Star, from its radiating limbs, and taking a course which Ernest seemed to hit upon instinctively, they descended into another gloom of trees, and wound downwards on a path still dark with damp in spite of the sunbeams, which in vain sought to penetrate the boughs. Magdalen caught a glimpse of a rustic bridge, which she pointed out, but Ernest replied,

"We will take that afterwards."

The noise, which had increased greatly, ceased to puzzle Magdalen, and began to awe her, but her arm was in Ernest's. On he went down a steep but wind-

ing descent, where little could be seen but the trees close upon them, and occasionally the bright sky above, and then when Magdalen thought that they must be descending into the bowels of the earth, they came out on the edge of a broad and raving stream, churning madly, and its waves sometimes pausing as it were to give an angry hiss at treatment they had just received. A turn round a tall projecting bit of bank, and Magdalen stood in presence of the cataract.

Not much sunshine there, but a sudden sense of gloomy power. Down came the waters, falling perpendicularly a hundred feet, and diving into a blackened hole at which Magdalen shuddered. Diving, only to be thrust furiously out by the demons of the fathomless pool, and shot with terrible force into seething eddies that raged and ran round and round, as if in maddened terror, and then to be launched along the boiling course of the current. Vast masses of rock were cast about amid the whirl, and against their bases the waters might be thought to be making desperate efforts to remove the obstruction before abandoning the fruitless task and hurrying on. But, even more than the great fall, the gorge in which it was placed impressed Magdalen. The sides were lofty, and presented walls of naked grey rock, save that here and there a fissure or a projection had permitted moss to cling, and high again above these stern walls, trees had taken savage hold, as they might, and had grown, defyingly, in fantastic attitudes, some leaning over as gazing down into the waters far below, some backwards, as if they feared to look over. Behind the cataract, the stone, where it could be seen, was black, but to right and left, reckless of the furious rush close

by, a few flowers clung, at various heights, upon earth that had been carried over the fall, and had become fixed.

"O, the dear, helpless flowers," was Magdalen's exclamation, as she made them out, after a long and awed gaze upon the cataract, and after long listening to its toneless clamour.

"Do you wish for some of them?"

"Ernest!" she exclaimed. "But you only meant to frighten me. I would not have you go nearer than we are for the world."

"There is no danger, love. Will you not like to come down these rocks, and see the pool closely?"

"No, no. I have seen enough for many dreams. If you do not care about staying, will you take me away?"

"Instantly. But I hope you will come here often, and learn to enjoy the place."

"It is too — what do I mean — it is too strong. An old, fierce terror — one can imagine it alive, and full of malicious delight at thought of people whom it has carried away to destruction."

"See how quietly the river flows at a little distance. Look down that vista."

"I don't like it. There the poor creatures must have floated away, after the terrible fall."

"I should be sorry to destroy any idea which makes the place more impressive, but I very much doubt whether the cataract has had many victims — perhaps, in the course of ages, some wanderer may have lost his way in a mist, and fallen over. But when you come to the top, you will see another phase of the waters. Look up — there is the bridge you pointed out."

"Do not let us go there, Ernest. I ask you not."

"Then we will not."

"Dear Ernest, do not think that I am giving way to foolish fear, and I am sure you know I am not likely to think that it makes a girl interesting. You are not supposing that?"

"*That* — in my Magdalen!" he said, caressingly.

"But that fall has worked in a strange way upon my nerves. I am not frightened. I don't know that I could tell you what I feel. But please take me home."

"My darling, if the living near the place is likely to be unpleasant to you, we will go. I can find a score of homes in the heart of scenery as fine as this, and you have only to make me think that you will not be happy here —"

"I shall be very happy — perfectly happy — only let me get away, just now, from this gloom. Perhaps I may ask you to bring me another time, you know how inconsistent wives are. Or no, you don't know, sir, as I am your first wife — you will know better when you are choosing your next."

They had reached a sunshiny place, and this little playfulness should have brought a sunshiny, or shall we say, a honey-moonlighted answer. But Ernest Dormer did not, on the instant, reply by even an affectionate gesture. Magdalen of course interpreted his silence in the most loving way, and begged his pardon for saying anything that could give him a moment's pain.

"But I intend to live with you for a hundred years at least," she said.

And by this time he had recovered himself to make fitting answer, and so they came back to the Star.

This time Highland Margaret was not inclined to permit any new tempting of luck, and they found a capital lunch awaiting them, and Margaret herself in attendance to see that it was not neglected. The friends who had lent the house had not forgotten to leave all that was needful to make a Highland sojourn as little unlike home-life in England as possible, and it was in a bumper of no ordinary claret that Ernest drank the health of his bride, and bade her welcome to her house. Nor need it be said that he caused the powerful Margaret to signify her good wishes for their prosperity, and that the toast was honoured by her in some Gaelic which enchanted Magdalen, and which she repeated, with more or less success, whenever Ernest filled her glass thereafter.

"And you think that you can manage a month in this eagle's nest, dear," he asked, when they were left to themselves.

"We will try," said Magdalen, prettily.

"There are a good many books," he said, "but unless we have bad days, we shall not trouble them much. You should rest, I think, for a little while, and then we will begin these excursions, about which I have received our friend's hints. There is an inn, down yonder — you can just see it from this window — whence we are to take our carriages for this part of the country,"

"I will be very quiet, if you will let me," said Magdalen, "but you will find me very obedient."

"I hope I shall," he said. "And once for all, I lay my high and sovereign commands upon you, as 'kind mate bound by holy vow,' that you do exactly

and precisely what you like, and that when I suggest anything that you do not like, you tell me of it."

Magdalen promised. But it was not what she wanted, though she rebuked herself severely when she found that she was unthankful.

"You have seen a great deal of the world, and of life," she said.

"Yes, I suppose I have. But what leads my wife's thoughts in that direction?"

"I have not seen a great deal of either. You will very soon find this out, if you have not found it out already, dear."

"I find that you know all that I could wish you to have known — much that I should never have had the wisdom to wish for — and the happiest thing of all is that you believe in me for the rest."

"Yes, dear, faithfully."

"But there is something more."

"No — yes — would it be possible for me to say anything that you could misunderstand, or that could vex you? I hope not."

"I swear to you never to understand anything which you may ever say in any sense but one, and that the most affectionate."

"Ah, if you will. And it is not of myself that I am thinking."

"Let me think of yourself. I have nothing else to do. I will do nothing else."

"Dearest, you have seen the world, and I suppose that most of its pleasures are beginning to weary you. You have married a girl who has not seen much of them. I want to ask you, when in your kindness and love you are planning all kinds of enjoyments for her,

and not because you care about them, to remember that her one enjoyment is in the thought that she is the sort of wife to make you happy."

And she threw her arms round his neck.

After other befitting acknowledgment, he said,

"I have seen a good deal, love, but I am not at all wearied, and all my pleasure in life will be renewed in making you enjoy it."

The dialogue gradually glided away into other channels, but Magdalen had not managed, as yet, to say all that she wished to say, and she was timid, lest she might seem to be offering him any kind of counsel. Hers was a beautiful mind, nor would Ernest Dormer have failed to detect its modest and secret beauty, but for circumstances that disturbed his own keen mental vision.

"Ernest," she said, "I had nearly forgotten. What an undutiful creature I am. We promised to write to mamma as soon as we arrived here."

"You promised, Mrs. Magdalen."

"But we were married, sir, so it was the same thing. I have read Blackstone's Commentaries, at least pieces of them, and I know all my rights."

"You shall have them all," said Ernest, smiling. "Well, I did better than promise, for while you were choosing among those Highland brooches, which everybody buys the first time of coming to Scotland, and nobody the second —"

"Stop, sir. If it was not the right thing to do, why did you encourage me, and give me your advice, and pay for the brooch, which I consider a perfect darling, and I will never part with it?"

"Do I not tell you, dear — because it is the right

thing to do the first time. Well, I went across and telegraphed to Naybury, to say that we were safe thus far, and would write to-morrow. Mamma is at this moment thinking of us as at lunch, and hoping that we have got everything we like, and that we did not leave many things behind us at our other resting places."

"Dear thing, I am certain she is. That was very good in you."

"By the way, Magdalen dear, how admirably your papa spoke at the breakfast. I have been at sundry weddings, but I never heard anything so happy."

"But then you were never being married, you know. Did he speak well, dear? I am sure he would. But I heard none of the speeches. Even about yours, although I listened to every word, I could only say that you never seemed to stop, and that everybody was applauding — no idea would stay with me long enough to let me understand it."

"I was brief enough, dear. The speeches of the day were those of papa, and of my friend, Samuel Mangles. But that he should speak well is nothing, it is his speciality. His business was to recollect that he was a distinguished London man, brought down express, to sparkle at the wedding of his friend with the prettiest girl in the county, or all the counties, and he fulfilled his engagement, and earned his breakfast."

"You make me laugh, dear, but I should not laugh if I thought that was all your best friend felt for you."

"My best friend has her hand in mine," said Ernest, as became a bridegroom.

"You will want stronger friends than a weak girl," she murmured. "And you are very kind to try to make me feel that I am of value to you. But I shall never

be to you what mamma was to papa. To be sure, you will not need such a help-mate."

"I have heard him own that he owed his position and success to his wife's energy."

"Yes, he does. And I may confide to you that though he is not quite so willing to own it — and it is natural, men being so proud — he owes quite as much to her earnest and affectionate encouragement of him. It was not only the urging him on to do things, I suppose many wives venture to do that. Mrs. Bulliman — you like her —"

"A wretch."

"No, she has many good points, I assure you. But she urges Mr. Bulliman to do various things, but is very unkind and rude to him, especially if he fails, which he often does from taking her advice. But mamma made up her mind that papa was one of the cleverest men that ever lived, and she never would allow him to forget it, and that has helped him on as much as anything."

"My dear Magdalen, you have observed closely, and you have given capital sketches of two wives."

"But I have not been uncharitable, dear," said Magdalen, "at least I hope not. Mrs. Bulliman is really a very good woman, and a most attentive mother."

"And though she is said to be proud, she showed becoming humility on that occasion, when she allowed Miss Phoebe to take a bridesmaid's part because the originally intended performer was absent."

"Nay, was it not kind? We ought not to laugh at her for that, Ernest."

"We won't. But I suppose that it will be Miss

Phoebe's last appearance in such a part, and that she is not likely to take the more important one in which Miss Conway was so charming."

"I was not charming, Ernest dear. I know quite well that I look pretty well sometimes — e e e — my finger — yes, I *will* be good — I *will* say generally, but on that day I looked as white as any ghost."

"Then, love, you were one of

‘The gentle ghosts, with eyes as fair
As star-beams among twilight trees.’”

"Who said that, Ernest? How lovely!"

"You have never read Shelley?"

"Papa said that I had better read him, but mamma had heard some opinions that made her suppose the poetry would do me no good, and she asked me not to take down the book. I would not vex her for the world, and I have never opened it, though it stands on a shelf I pass fifty times a day. He was — at least he believed nothing — was it not so?" said Magdalen, in an under-voice.

"You may think that he believed a great deal too much, my love. But I understand you, of course. He was not a Christian."

"You shall guide me in all my reading, Ernest, and I shall trust to you not to let any book do me harm."

What have I married, thought Ernest Dormer to himself, as his beautiful wife laid her head on his shoulder, and subsided into a dreamy silence. Here is a girl who is told that she ought not to read a book, which she also hears is read by most people, and she has never touched it. Yet she has a will. I have seen

that. And she has the stronger will which subjugates her own wishes to what she considers duty.

And then, passing from the thought of Magdalen's merits to that of his own position, Ernest Dormer hastily reviewed much of his life, and the issue to which he had brought it. After all troubles, all struggles, all follies, there he was, with one of the sweetest women in the world, lying half asleep on his shoulder, and his for all time. The reality of his good fortune had hardly come home to him before.

They were a long time silent and still. But there are limits to everything, and at last the limits of Highland Margaret's patience with wedded lovers were passed. With a most discreet clatter, she made her way to the apartment, and found Ernest, of course, looking out at the window with a telescope, and Mrs. Dormer studying Black's Scottish Guide. They looked quite pleased to see her, and entered with much interest into her various proposals about dinner. Magdalen took her heart by storm by an attempt at repeating the Gaelic good wishes, and Ernest by his attention to the dogs, her favourites, who ventured in after their patroness. And after a good talk with Margaret, and after various equally important conversations with Netty, who was unhappy until Magdalen had examined the house from corner to corner, and had formally assumed the mistress, Ernest and his wife settled down into their Highland home.

CHAPTER XXI.

The Honeymoon, and its Setting.

IN that pleasant home they sojourned for the appointed time. On their arrival, Ernest had spoken of excursions and explorations, and Magdalen had aided him to map out such little routes, and there was a sort of understanding that they were to see as much of the country around them as possible. But, day after day passed, and these researches were postponed, for the lightest reasons, and husband and wife felt, and at last avowed, a disinclination to extend their wanderings beyond the limits of the domain which had been placed at their command. Sometimes, in the evening, when the day had been spent in the pleasantest idleness, and neither could give a better account of the time than that it had passed quickly and happily, Ernest and Magdalen made solemn resolve that next morning they would certainly set off to visit some mountain, or lake, or glen that had been specially commended to their attention by the thoughtful owners of the house, but with the bright morning came the feeling that the wedded lovers could not improve their position, and mountain, lake, and glen were left to their solitude. Walks through the woods, long halts in the shade, and hours passed among the rocks at the foot of the cataract, which soon lost all its terrors for Magdalen — so the days went by.

“We shall have very little to say to mamma about Highland scenery, Magdalen,” said her husband one morning, as they were seeking their way down the

path to the waterfall. "We must really read up the guide-books, and cram for an examination."

"I was thinking, too," Magdalen said, laughing, "that she will be greatly amused at hearing how little we have done, but we must tell her the truth, and say that we were too happy to care about moving away."

"I think you have been happy here," he answered, earnestly.

"And you?" asked his wife, archly — yet something in his tone seemed to her to be out of tune with her heart.

"Nay, you need not ask that."

They seated themselves on a favourite rock, and there was no more said about happiness, just then.

"I brought a book," he said, after a pause, "but the sound of the water is pleasanter than that of the voice, perhaps."

For the moment, Magdalen thought that she should prefer silence and her own thoughts, but she instantly conquered the feeling, and answered merrily, —

"That is a most ingenious excuse for idleness, sir, but I will not have it. I am greatly interested in that wonderful story, and all the time I am angry with myself for trying to believe such impossibilities."

"Yes, dear, those are the effects M. Dumas produces, but he is very good reading, notwithstanding. So now hear how the Four Dukes went forth to murder, and whether they succeeded."

He translated with so much ease that Magdalen would hardly have known that he was not reading an English book to her. But they soon wearied, even of

the *Reine Margot*, and after half an hour they found themselves again listening to the voice of the cataract.

Ernest had said that he thought that Magdalen was happy, and to her own question he had replied in a way implying that such question was needless. But how did Magdalen answer to herself — Ernest to himself?

For the latter it may be said that, as far as he might, he avoided self-questioning. There had been much in his life that made the process unwelcome, and it was not simply in the spirit of a philosopher that he sought to enjoy the present hour without troubling himself about its successor. He was glad to be constantly compelled to devote himself to the fair girl by his side, and it may be that he was even more assiduous in his attentions to her than he himself knew. He was grateful to her for speaking to him, grateful to her for making him speak, and for her leading him into new and fresh thought and habit. Day by day a strange and widening distance seemed to set itself between Ernest Dormer and his old life, and he was glad that it was so, and jealously watchful lest he should allow himself to bridge that gap by thinking on times that had gone by. If it be said that this was not the frame of mind of a happy and newly-wedded lover, and that Magdalen deserved a heartier and healthier regard, there is no contradiction to the censure, there is full assent to the claim. But the reader is in the secret.

Magdalen was not. Nor was she conscious that any secret was between them. But she was conscious that up to the present time any ideal that she had

formed in her girlhood as to the communion of married lovers was being imperfectly fulfilled. Her handsome and accomplished husband was all tenderness and devotion, her wishes were forestalled, and even suggested, and the new companionship, so strange to a young bride, was made delightful by the unerring delicacy of Ernest's attentions. It was impossible for Magdalen to wish that there could be any change in her husband's manner or behaviour. But her feminine instinct, quickened perhaps by long and anxious thought, assured her that no first love — no entire and passionate love was by her side. Ernest seldom or never talked of himself. Of her he was ever ready to talk, and into the least details of her life, into her minutest feelings, no less than into all her innocent history, her husband seemed singularly happy to inquire, instantly ready to be interested in all that she could tell him. But she got little in exchange, little, that is to say, of the same that she gave him. He spoke lovingly, and whether with effort or not he was ungrudging in his love-homage, and showed no sign of pre-occupation of mind, while his lighter talk was charming. His travels, his reading, his own literary work, his anecdotes, his ready wit, his acquaintance with good society and what he pleased to tell of other than good society, all supplied them with fresh and varied conversation, and Magdalen was instructed and amused as she had never before been. But she wanted more, and for the time that want was not supplied. A few hesitating, timid efforts — hints at which an impassioned lover would have darted with rapture, — to obtain more insight into his heart, she risked in certain quiet hours, but ceased from them with some sensation of chill at her

own heart when she found that though she was kindly met, she made no real advance.

Of course, had Magdalen had the advantage of a course of French novels, or even of their feeble English reflections, we know that she could have solved the problem at once, and at some well-chosen moment of passion could have flung herself demonstratively on his bosom, and grappled him to her own while she sobbed out a half-fierce, half-tender demand to know what rival had come between her and his love, and a command either to leave her for ever, or to give her all that she had thought she had acquired in wedding him. And it is impossible to say what the result might have been. But, you see, Magdalen was a modest English girl, very willing to be loved, not averse from any modest and womanly arts by which love might be won, but for want of such educational prompting as has been mentioned, and in the absence of a habit of demonstration, Mrs. Dormer did not avail herself of the stormy expedient which she might have tried.

Her course was tame and unimpassioned. She had promised and vowed to love her husband, and she intended to do so. It might be that he was learning to love her as fully as she could desire, but, being older than herself, and knowing more of human nature, he was not in haste to open to her all the treasures of his affection. The girl, not unaware of her own goodness, might pout at this hesitation, the wife smiled down her self-love, and awaited the just judgment which she knew must come. In the meantime she would not seek for more than he pleased to give, but nothing on her part should retard the day when all

a husband's confidence should be hers. And at least she would show him that she fully trusted in him, and that her heart was in his hands.

It would therefore seem that here were the materials for a delightful honeymoon, and neither Ernest nor Magdalen ever allowed that theirs had not been delightful. The days sped fast.

One morning, at breakfast, a note was brought to Ernest.

"Am I permitted?" he said, with an affectation of extreme deference.

"Certainly not, sir; give it me directly," said Magdalen, laughing, and holding out her hand.

His delay in obeying did not occupy a second, yet there was a delay, and Magdalen saw it, and drew back her hand hastily as he put out the note to her. It was the first letter he had received since their marriage, except some despatches from her parents which were playfully directed to Mr. and Mrs. Dormer.

"I don't seem to know the writing," said Ernest, who had not failed to see her action, and who was hurt with himself, for he had not thought of first perusing the note, but certain old habits had told for a moment. "Do you, love?"

Good girl that she was, she instantly took up the note, and if there were the least irritation in her mind, she conquered it in an instant, and had a smile for him as she read and gave back the paper.

"Yes, sir, I do know the handwriting. It is by a gentleman, and a dear friend of mine."

"Does he want to defy me to a duel for your sake? I am his man: but where is that volume of Dumas? I must see what it is chivalrous to do in

such a case. Whichever falls, the other must commit the body to the cataract. Meantime, love, another cup of coffee."

"You don't recognise the hand. He will be so pleased. It is one of his little whims."

"Come down to the inn, where you are waited for?" read Ernest. "Margaret," he called, "are there a few pistols in the house, or have you a broadsword or so?"

Magdalen clapped her hands with glee.

"It is a shame to spoil his little surprise for you, dear, but I will not be in any secret without you. It is papa."

"Mr. Conway!"

"Yes. But why he has come without letting us know he must tell us himself. O, Ernest!" — she said, suddenly becoming serious — and he read her thought in a second.

"No, no, love. He has no bad news — your first thought was the right one. He would not have sent such a note if anything were wrong — see, he has drawn something at the top — I suppose it is meant for a couple of doves — you and me."

"Dear old thing, so he has. How silly I was. But it is your fault, sir. You have taken me away from everybody, and kept me a prisoner here, and now I am startled at anything from anybody but yourself. I hope you are very sorry for your conduct," she said, leaning on his shoulder. And as he professed intense sorrow, she forgave him, and, silently, told him so.

"What shall we do?" said Ernest. "Pretend not to know the handwriting, and send down word that Mr.

Dormer declines to meet strangers. Or would he prefer my going down, and being duly astonished?"

"Let us both go down directly, dear. I do so long to see his dear old face, and mamma's?"

"But I will bet that I can give you that pleasure without your going down this hot morning," said Ernest, crossing the room, and taking up the telescope, which he brought to bear upon the inn at the foot of the hill. "It is not in human nature, at least in nature above a bagman's, to keep away from that window long, even for a Highland breakfast. I see something moving. No, that is a tall girl, one of the servants. The light is well upon the room, we shall have them presently. The girl is tasting something: that is very considerate and careful in her. She moves away suddenly, somebody else has come in—I can't see yet. Yes, another female figure has gone to the table—I can't make her out."

"Let me see, dear."

He knelt, so as to give his shoulder as a rest for the instrument.

"Have you got the window?"

"Yes, it shines beautifully in the sun, but I cannot make anything out," said Magdalen. "I can see better with the naked eye—O, I am looking at the lake."

"Well, that is very beautiful, also," said Ernest, laughing, "but——"

"I see her! It is mamma. She has come to the window. The servant is pointing in our direction. I believe she sees us—wave a handkerchief, dear, quick!"

"There's a banner somewhere here—that will be more dignified," said Ernest, hastily fetching the article, and holding it forth in the sun. It was instantly sa-

luted from the inn — two white handkerchiefs shot out, and Magdalen recognised both parents. And for the first time Ernest had to exert a little kindly authority, as they went down, to prevent his wife from performing the journey too hastily. In half an hour, however, Magdalen was in her mother's arms, whence she was speedily transferred to her father's.

"Not half so brown as you ought to be, Mrs. Dormer," said Mrs. Conway, as they sat round the breakfast-table, which had been rapidly and lavishly spread for the Conways.

"Scold Ernest, mamma."

"And I will. Papa and I were prepared to see you well scorched with your rambles, and you look as if you had been indoors all the time."

"We have not, I assure you," said Ernest, "in fact we have lived in the open air, but I must own that we have taken things quietly."

"Why, you have never even been here, I find," said Mrs. Conway, "though the view of your house, from this side, is so charming."

"I have been down, two or three times," said Ernest, "about horses," he added, demurely.

"Yes," said Mrs. Conway, "and you have been punctually followed, next morning, by your messenger, to say that the horses were not wanted. Maggie has not been ill, I am sure," said the mother, "or you would have let us know."

"I am inclined to think," said Mr. Conway, "that the young persons have been so spoiled by the splendid scenery of Naybury, that Scotland is flat to them by comparison. Or was it that they did not want to be spoiled for Naybury by the irregularities of Scotland?"

"Neither," said Ernest; "and I will make clean confession, for the fault has been entirely mine—or rather yours and mamma's. You gave me society that was so exceedingly satisfactory that I never cared about coming away from home. That is the whole truth."

"*Habemus confitentem reum*," said Mr. Conway, "so no more is to be said. Moreover, you did exactly what I should have done, under similar circumstance, but for circumstances over which I had no control."

"Yes, that's true," said Mrs. Conway. "On our wedding tour, papa wanted to stick at Thun, because it was so delightful; but I had no notion of not seeing as much of the country as possible, especially as I did not know that I should ever see it again; and I made him travel about until, I believe, he was quite glad when the trip was over. Men are dreadfully lazy creatures, except in their own particular work."

"One mountain is uncommonly like another," said Mr. Conway. "And if you travel only for the sake of talking about what you have seen, you may invent any account you like, and those who have been in the same district are afraid to contradict you. Two travellers at a dinner-table at home are never so enthusiastic as over the description of landscapes which neither has seen, for the best of all reasons."

"Well, we shall put an end to your idleness now," said Mrs. Conway. "You have had nearly five weeks, and here we are, as we promised. We slept at Inverness last night, and papa wanted to stay to a late breakfast, but I made him come on."

"I didn't care about the breakfast," said Mr. Conway, "but I wanted to see the bridge over the Ness,

because I had heard a story about it. There was a cell in one of the piers, and in this, before the days when mad people were kindly treated, they used to keep any pauper lunatic who was troublesome. When the river rose, it drove up the rats into the cell, and it was one of the amusements of the place to stand and listen to his shrieks while the rats were eating him."

"Do not tell such horrible stories, William. I do not believe that such atrocities were ever allowed."

"I could tell you of worse things than that, my dear," said Mr. Conway, "but I will not spoil your breakfast. I am speaking of the old days. They are gone, and so is the old bridge, and the lunatics are kept in a beautiful asylum on a hill."

"So you have no news to tell us, Maggie?" said her mother.

"Only the good news, mamma, that we have been so happy."

"God bless you, my child; always have that to tell me, and I want no more," said Mrs. Conway, her eyes swimming. "Don't be a hypocrite, papa," she added, raising her honest face towards her husband, who pretended to want to look out at the scenery, "for at this minute you can no more see the mountains than I can. There," she said, wiping her eyes, and laughing, "that is for the first and last time." And she put her hand into Ernest's, but he rose and kissed her, for which graceful and filial conduct Magdalen felt inclined to do the same by him, but reserved her approbation.

"And is there any news from Naybury, mamma?" she asked.

"Well, not much beyond what we have told you in

our letters. There is something wrong at Saxbury; but we do not in the least know what."

"And therefore, of course, we believe the worst," interjected Mr. Conway.

"Mr. Abbott, that lawyer, is constantly there."

"Observe the emphasis on 'that,'" remarked her husband. "Yet we know nothing against Mr. Abbott, except that he is a lawyer."

"Of course he is helping the rector in some nefarious scheme," said Mrs. Conway,

"Too hard a word, my dear. It means not only wicked, but wicked in the extreme."

"Does it? I am glad of it, for I dare say it is exactly the right word."

"But you really must not bring Ernest back to Naybury charged with all sorts of unfounded prejudices against the resident clergy of the Church of England. My dear Ernest, we know nothing whatever against Mr. Grafton, or about his business with his lawyer."

"You had better say, William, that Mr. Grafton is an angel, which he never was and never will be."

"I do not think he ever was. I have no information enabling me to decide the second point. But we must not prejudice Ernest, who will probably meet him in society, and can form his own opinion."

"He will not meet him at our house, with my consent. That is," said Mrs. Conway, whose kind nature instantly reminded her that she was forgetting that the house was to be Dormer's also, "if Ernest should like to invite him, he shall receive every attention, but I do not think that I should ask him to come to see me."

"At the wedding," said Ernest, "I had not much inclination to notice the guests, but Mr. Grafton seemed

a courtly kind of person, with sufficient sense of his own merits. A much better mannered man than his son, I thought."

"Yes, as far as outsides go, no doubt," said Mrs. Conway. "But Edward Grafton, though he is impulsive, and nervous, and awkward sometimes, has a heart, which is more than anybody can say of his father."

"And we have come five hundred miles to abuse Mr. Grafton."

"No, William dear, not abuse, but truth is truth. But there is somebody who is going to speak her mind about the whole family at Saxbury, Maggie, and is, I hear, going over to Saxbury to do it."

"Not Mrs. Bulliman, mamma?"

"Who else could do it, child? Yes, and though I hate scandal generally, I could not help making Mrs. Fanshaw promise to write me word what takes place. Mind I send her an address that will reach me."

"Then," asked Ernest, laughing, "is regular notice given of the lady bishop's visitation of her clergy?"

"It comes to much the same thing. You know, I think, what chiefly decided Mrs. Bulliman on rebuking the rectory people—it was some light talk by Edward Grafton about missionaries. She declared at the Dorcas meeting that she would remonstrate, but she waited to see the effect of some letters which she made her girls write to Edward, in which his deplorable wickedness was set out. We know what sort of letters they compose, because poor little Fanny Buxton had to endure a pack of them, which she brought to me."

"That very pretty little girl, Ernest, a bridesmaid," said Magdalen.

"I remember Miss Buxton," said Ernest, "but I do not think her so very pretty, though by contrast with Miss Bulliman she may have seemed so."

"O, but she is sweetly pretty," said Magdalen, "though you don't like the word."

"Yes, I do, in its place, and it exactly suits her, so far as I recollect. I have an impression of what you call, dear, a sweetness, particularly unacceptable to me. But I saw very little of her, you know, and I can look again, if you like, some of these days."

"You shall, for she is one of my pets."

"She is a very good little girl," said Mrs. Conway, "and I take some credit to myself for having helped to make her one, instead of letting her run away into becoming a little goose, as she was rather inclined to do."

"It is not for me to question mamma's ability at making good girls," said Ernest, speaking to nobody in particular, and in an undertone.

"I hear you, sir," said Magdalen.

"The scene at the rectory will be interesting," said Mr. Conway, "unless the rector subdues his pride, and smiles the lady out of court. Let me see: is there nothing else that will interest our young hermit and his bride, our Edwin and Angelina? Our Naybury annals are not exciting, it must be owned."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Conway. "I thought the place frightfully dull after London, but as soon as I began to take an interest in my neighbours the dulness went away, and now I seem to wonder how anybody can be dull at Naybury. Ernest will soon get used to it, and then he will feel as I do."

"He has to get used to me, first, mamma," said Magdalen, saucily.

"Yes," said Mr. Conway. "And when that feat is accomplished, he must take stock of the neighbourhood. He must be interested in the quarrels between Beccles, the doctor, and the Board of Guardians; also in Beccles's buying a new horse, or selling an old trap. Then he must be eager for the last scandal about Sir Richard Salvington, and his bad behaviour to his wife, and his Jews. We shall endeavour to make him very anxious about the drainage over at Trafalgar, and perhaps he will devote his literary abilities to stating the case of the unhappy tenants who are being poisoned. The subscription for the memorial window in honour of the last vicar has languished: it would be a graceful thing for Ernest to take it up on our assurance that the late lamented was a very good man. Then there is Cutcheon's encroachment on Barfield Green; that is a case for a village Hampden with a dauntless breast; and then the history of our Ruins has never been properly written. Besides which, there is the great case of the landlord of the beer-shop at the end of the town, and his conduct towards the two tipsy militiamen, on which awful proceeding we have new lights every day—in fact, my dear son-in-law, have no fear lest occupation and excitement should not be provided for you."

"Your papa must find fault," said Mrs. Conway, "but you will tell Ernest, Magdalen, that any kindness done in Naybury is very gratefully received, and that nobody will expect him to trouble himself in the least about anything that does not concern him. I

never knew a place where you were so entirely free to do as you liked."

"That is a new view of the case, certainly," said Mr. Conway.

"And you are doing the very thing you were warning me against just now, that is, prejudicing Ernest against people before he knows them."

"I will take care that he is not prejudiced, mamma," said Mrs. Dormer. Have you heard anything about my poor pensioners? Have any of them been to you?"

"Only that good-for-nothing woman, Mrs. Jull, who came asking for old clothes, and who had clearly been at the public-house."

"Did you give her anything, dear? I hope so. Her husband is a cripple."

"I gave her a lecture, which I think she is not likely to forget."

"I daresay she deserved it, but I can see by your eyes that you did more than that."

"If I did, it was for your sake, not hers, my dear. O, and that very detestable and impertinent woman who locked up her cottage and went away — I always forget her name, but it reminds me of fawning?"

"I know, mamma — has she come back?"

"I don't know, but a servant at Saxbury has got a strange story about her — a girl who nurses the children at Mrs. Blaby's the clerk's wife, and went into the church one night after service, just before the doors were closed —"

"To fetch," said Mr. Conway, gravely, and looking earnestly at his son-in-law, "to fetch two ipecacuanha lozenges which the second child had left on

the third hassock from the door of pew 43 — be careful, my dear Ernest, of being led to believe that the lozenges were liquorice, or that they were on the prayer-book ledge — I know such things have been said."

"But, William dear," said Mrs. Conway, "the curiosity of the thing is in the very minuteness of the story, so you ought not to laugh. I don't know what the girl went for, but she reported to her mistress that the woman I speak of came out of the vestry, in which there was nobody but Edward Grafton — he had read the service — and that she was putting up gold in a purse — the money chinked. And that night she disappeared."

"First, is the story likely to be true, or an invention of the girl's?" said Mr. Conway. "I hear of it for the first time. You know what Mr. Mill says about the lower orders, namely, that they are habitual liars."

"But this is a good girl," said Mrs. Conway. "I know something about her — she was in a Sunday-school, and I could take her word."

"A mystery, expressly got up in honour of Ernest Dormer's settling at Naybury," said Mr. Conway. "I did not think that we should be able to give you such good entertainment. When we get home we will make it our business to ferret out the great secret of the curate's gold."

"You do not hazard a guess at the riddle, love," said Ernest.

"I have no sort of guess. But Mrs. Faunt is a very strange person. If I say that nothing she did would surprise me, I only mean that she is utterly

unlike the class of persons among whom I found her, and I should have passed her door always, except for fear of hurting her feelings."

"We shall have time to speculate on the mystery," said Mr. Conway. "Ernest, I have not smoked in masculine company since you left us. Shall we leave our wives to take care of one another, while we stroll down to that river?"

As they went, Mr. Conway said,

"You told me, wisely, that you did not want to be troubled with letters during your trip, so I left two or three that have come to Naybury. One of them has a signature in the corner of the envelope, Walter Latrobe, I think."

Ernest Dormer felt as one feels when a pleasant dream is unpleasantly broken. His old life came back to him with the words, and seemed to set itself steadily in array against him. He recalled his last interview with Latrobe, and the promise which the latter had been compelled to give him that he should be informed of what the soldier had done in his friend's behalf; and for the moment Ernest found it difficult to account to himself for the exceeding earnestness with which he had enforced his request. He wished that Latrobe had not written. But the letter had been left behind in Naybury, and there must be another month before he could receive it. That was something, and with a strong effort of will he dismissed the train of thought which the words of Mr. Conway had suddenly raised.

"And you can give our Maggie a pretty good character, Ernest, eh?" asked her father. "We have

not imposed upon you with an imitation of a nice kind of wife."

"My wife has one fault," said Ernest, taking the hand of his father-in-law.

"Well, she must correct it. Tell me, and I will reprove her."

"She makes me despair of ever being quite worthy of her."

"You will get over that," said Mr. Conway, "and, as an older married man, I advise you not to reproach her with it too often."

END OF VOL. I.

not imposed upon you with an imitation of a nice kind
of wife."
"My wife has one fault," said Ernest, taking the
hand of his father-in-law.
"Well, she must correct it. Tell me, and I will
reprove her."
"She makes me despair of ever being quite worthy
of her."
"You will get over that," said Mr. Conway, "and
as an older married man, I advise you not to reproach
her with it too often."

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.

END OF VOL. I.

1848

BRITISH ANTHROPOLOGY

THE BRITISH ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE
HAS THE HONOUR TO ANNOUNCE THAT
THE BRITISH ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE
HAS THE HONOUR TO ANNOUNCE THAT
THE BRITISH ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE
HAS THE HONOUR TO ANNOUNCE THAT

COLLECTION

THE BRITISH ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE
HAS THE HONOUR TO ANNOUNCE THAT
THE BRITISH ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE
HAS THE HONOUR TO ANNOUNCE THAT

BRITISH ANTHROPOLOGY

PRINTING OF VOL. 1. 1848. PUBLISHED.

SOONER OR LATER BY SHIRLEY BROOKS

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II

THE
BRITISH
MUSEUM
OF
NATURAL HISTORY
LONDON

COLLECTION

THE
BRITISH
MUSEUM
OF
NATURAL HISTORY
LONDON

PRINTED BY J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.

SOONER OR LATER BY SHIRLEY BROOK

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II

THE
BRITISH
MUSEUM
OF
NATURAL HISTORY
LONDON

COLLECTION

BRITISH MUSEUM

PRINTED BY J. JOHNSON, ST. PAULS CHURCH-YARD.

SOONER OR LATER BY SHIRLEY BROOK

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II

Brooks, Shirley

Sooner or Later In 3 Volumes

Bd.: I

Leipzig 1868

P.o.angl. 38 g-1

urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10745025-5